

## Dying Prepared in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe

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# Dying Prepared in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe

*Edited by*

Anu Lahtinen

Mia Korpiola



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# Contents

List of Illustrations VII

Notes on Contributors VIII

- 1 Introduction: Preparing for a Good Death in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe 1

*Anu Lahtinen and Mia Korpiola*

- 2 Restless Dead or Peaceful Cadavers? Preparations for Death and Afterlife in Medieval Iceland 18

*Kirsi Kanerva*

- 3 William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (1366–1404) and His Preparations for Death 44

*Cindy Wood*

- 4 “At Death’s Door”: The Authority of Deathbed Confessions in Medieval and Early Modern Swedish Law 65

*Mia Korpiola*

- 5 The Concern for Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century 105

*Dominika Burdzy*

- 6 Death with an Agenda: Preparing for an Aristocratic Death in Reformation Sweden 124

*Anu Lahtinen*

- 7 Dying Unprepared in Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons 142

*Otfried Czaika*

- 8 “Lord, have mercy on me”: Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden 160

*Riikka Miettinen*

|                                                  |            |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>9 Preparing for Death: Concluding Remarks</b> | <b>187</b> |
| <i>Bertil Nilsson</i>                            |            |

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Select Bibliography</b> | <b>201</b> |
|----------------------------|------------|

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| <b>Index</b> | <b>205</b> |
|--------------|------------|

# List of Illustrations

## Illustrations

- 1.1 This posthumous portrait of Hannibal Gustrav Wrangel was in all likelihood painted in Germany 12
- 6.1 Executioner’s sword used to behead Johan Fleming in 1599 135
- 6.2 Baron Gustav Banér (1547–1600) preparing for his death in Linköping 139

## Table

- 3.1 Acts of Spiritual and Temporal Mercy 48



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# Introduction: Preparing for a Good Death in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe<sup>1</sup>

*Anu Lahtinen and Mia Korpiola*

## **Evolving Theory and Practice of Preparing for Death: Pagan to Catholic, Catholic to Reformed**

In the medieval and early modern period, when many Northern European communities embraced new religious ideas and practices, their attitudes and practices dealing with death and afterlife went through several profound changes. Firstly, Christianisation introduced a new doctrine of a good life, afterlife, and salvation. Secondly, in the Reformation period, this doctrine went through important changes as regards the significance of grace versus works. Both processes had their impact on the way people and their relatives would prepare for their departure from worldly life.

Throughout the period, regardless of their religious convictions, people were very much aware of the fact that while death was certain, its hour was uncertain. Through sermons, legal documents, and everyday communications, everyone was informed that after death, there would be a reckoning and they would have to account for their actions. Christians were taught that sins would be punished and good deeds – or at least faith – rewarded. Souls were destined either to heaven or hell, depending on how individuals had behaved during their lives.

Advised both by local custom and learned doctrines, when people realised that the end was near, they would do their very best to be reconciled with God and also with their relatives, friends, and enemies alike. Confession of one's sins, contrition, and making amends were part of the penitential process. Because of this, it was generally presupposed, also in law, that a person facing death would speak the absolute truth, as otherwise, his soul risked eternal damnation. In addition to confession, praying for the dying and extreme unction

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1 The editors of the volume would like to cordially thank the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies and the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, which enabled the organizing of the conference “Preparing for Death in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” that formed the general basis for this volume. We would also wish to extend our thanks to Marcella Mulder from Brill, the anonymous reader of the volume, and Anita Geritz.

belonged to the religious deathbed rituals. There were also many mundane affairs to be considered, such as questions of inheritance and the well-being of those left behind. The last will of a person, oral or written, the *ultima voluntas*, was given much emphasis.<sup>2</sup>

While the Christian values and teachings were adopted and came to be shared by most of the people living in medieval and early modern Europe, local traditions, living conditions, and individual circumstances had an effect on the implementation of the common teachings. The conversion of Europe was a slow process. Scandinavia in the north and the Finno-Ugric and Slavonic peoples of Eastern and North-Eastern Europe were the last regions to be Christianised in the High Middle Ages, while the Grand Duchy of Lithuania officially adopted the Catholic faith only in 1387. Certainly, Christian influences related to Northern cultures of death and dying can be observed even earlier, for example in burial practices. However, because of the tardive Christianisation, older belief systems, such as importance given to the veneration of ancestral spirits, had their impact on local practices long after nominal conversion had taken place.<sup>3</sup> As for preparations for death, these could be inspired by seeing a small light that resembled a will o' the wisp could that was believed to forebode death in Nordic folklore until the modern times. Seeing a white or pale horse, connected to the Norse death goddess Hel, could also indicate

2 In general, see, e.g. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1981); Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996).

3 Marika Mägi, *At the Crossroads of Space and Time: Graves, Changing Society and Ideology on Saaremaa (Ösel), 9th-13th centuries AD*, (Culture Clash or Compromise Papers) 6 (Tallinn, 2002), pp. 150–57; Nancy Caciola, “Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, 2000), pp. 66–86, here pp. 67–68; Lauri Harvilahti, “Ethnocultural Knowledge and Mythical Models: The Making of St Olaf, The God of Thunder, and St Elijah During the First Centuries of the Christian Era in the Scandinavian and Baltic Regions,” in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, eds. Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, and Alexandra Bergholm, (Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces) 3 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 199–219; Beata Wojciechowska, “The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages,” in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154763/02\\_beata\\_final\\_2.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154763/02_beata_final_2.pdf?sequence=1), last visited on 20 Apr. 2017, pp. 32–48.

impending pestilence and death.<sup>4</sup> The Christian doctrine and customs mixing with local beliefs resulted in local variations.

Regardless of the exact doctrine that people were supposed to follow they were anxious about the moment they would have to go to meet their Maker. Sudden or violent death, not to talk about suicide, was perceived as a threat because the soul could not be prepared for afterlife, nor could the dying person properly bid farewell to relatives and friends. The fear of dying unprepared could haunt people like it did the protagonists of *Hamlet*. Consequently, during the Middle Ages, various strategies for coping with death and its unpredictable nature were developed over time. There were guidelines and handbooks advising the priests how to approach a person on his sickbed and how to console her or him according to the situation at hand. A whole genre of *ars moriendi* literature developed, teaching people about the way of dying piously and properly. Guidelines were famously formulated in 1408 in *De arte moriendi* by Jean Gerson (1363–1429), the service books and devotional literature offered even lay people guidelines about how to make proper preparations for the afterlife.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Catholic doctrine, pious works and intercessions were an important way to salvation, and purgatory would cleanse people from minor faults after they had died. (This is also further discussed in the concluding

4 Louise Hagberg, *När döden gästar: Svenska folkseder och svensk folketro i samband med död och begravning* (1937; repr. Stockholm, 2015), pp. 32–34 and 38–39.

5 About *ars moriendi* and its devolution over time see, for example, Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Aldershot, 2007); Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, eds., *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015). About *ars moriendi* and *mors beata* in a Swedish context, for example, Urbanus Rhegius, *Sielennes tröst och läkedom*, trans. N.N. (Stockholm, 1548); Matti Parvio, ed., *Manuale seu exequiale Aboense 1522*, (Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia) 115 (Helsinki, 1980), pp. 22–50 and 146–52; Göran Stenberg, *Döden dikterar: En studie av likpredikningar och gravtal från 1600- och 1700-talen* (Stockholm, 1998); Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Uppsala 2008), pp. 131–65; Markus Hagberg, ed., *Jean Gersons Ars moriendi: Om konsten att dö*, (Skara stiftshistoriska sällsksaps skriftserie) 45 (Skara, 2009); Kaisa Häkkinen, ed., *Codex Westh: Westhin koodeksin teksti*, (Wanhon suomen arkisto) 5 (Turku, 2012), pp. 110–18; Eivor Andersen Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem De Vita Hominis in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark,” in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05\\_eivor\\_final\\_2.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05_eivor_final_2.pdf?sequence=1), last visited on 20 Apr. 2017, pp. 106–28; Otfried Czaika’s chapter in this volume.

remarks of Bertil Nilsson in this book.) By contrast, in the Reformation period, the Protestants focused on faith and Divine Grace in accordance with the “*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*” principle.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the Reformation literature erased intercessions and purgatory and put emphasis on preparations made during one’s lifetime. Lutheran obituaries or funeral biographies emphasised individual examples of pious death. The theology of Reformation transferred the late medieval *ars moriendi* to the sixteenth century and enhanced this heritage with new cultural phenomena, especially funeral sermons, which became an important place to exemplify and communicate the doctrine. With the reception of the *ars moriendi* followed a special notion of the prepared death, in particular the idea of a calm and “good” death that reflected that the deceased was able to partake in God’s grace and salvation. Still, much of the *mors beata* ideal remained the same over time.<sup>7</sup>

Although moralists lamented the frivolousness of people who immersed in worldly matters postponed the necessary preparations for death and neglected the salvation of their souls,<sup>8</sup> most people had some forewarning of their demise. Few people actually died quite without any warning, abruptly mowed down in their prime by the Grim Reaper, as a completely sudden and unexpected death was an exceptional occurrence. Yet, death literally by a thunderbolt from heaven could take place.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, most people had at least some possibilities to attempt to stage their preparations for death in accordance to the dominant cultural expectations and perceptions of a Good Death. Also the afterworld was ready to construe and interpret the last stages or moments of the lives of their beloved or respected departed ones in the light of the pious *ars moriendi* script.

So much for the ideal death, the aims of which are shared in many other times and places, too. However, despite the general ideal of a peaceful death, people of the past were well aware of the fact that in many cases the

6 E.g. Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife,” pp. 120–26.

7 Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife,” pp. 119–26; Volker Leppin, “Preparing for Death: From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon,” in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9–23.

8 Jeffrey Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi: An examination, translation and collation of the manuscripts of the shorter Latin version*. Unpublished thesis, School of Graduate Studies, University of Ottawa, 1995, pp. 18 and 21, available online, <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/10313/1/MMo7840.PDF>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

9 E.g. Janet Shirley, trans. and ed., *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449: Translated from the anonymous Journal d’un Bourgeois de Paris* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 50–51.

experienced reality was much messier and more violent. Priests had to be prepared to comfort people who were about to die in circumstances that were far from ideal. In search of solace, many dogmas were evaded or re-interpreted for consolation; either the explanations and arrangements were suggested by the learned clergy or by ordinary people themselves. How, then, did they cope with their preparations for death, given the doctrines from above and the unpredictable moment they had to deal with?

This book focuses on the very core of the situation pictured above. The chapters of the volume discuss how people in the North prepared for death, applying common teachings in local circumstances. The articles cover a time span reaching from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, which allows an analysis over centuries of religious change that are too often artificially separated in historical studies and publications. The focus is on the time period when the Northern societies had already been Christianised. However, in many cases, one can also observe pre-Christian influence or local practices that were alien to actual Christian doctrine and dictated by local circumstances. The volume brings new light on how medieval and early modern people in Northern Europe coped with their own mortality and the mortality of people close to them. From medieval Icelanders, still connected to many pre-Christian ideas concerning death and dying, to early modern Swedes listening to Protestant sermons, these people were searching for guidance on how to best prepare for their departure or to cope with the fact that they were going to lose someone near and dear.

The volume proceeds chronologically, starting with the early tardive transition from pagan beliefs to Christianity, presented in Kirsi Kanerva's analysis of dying well in medieval Iceland. Kanerva investigates how Icelanders in the sagas discussed ways of preparing for a death that would not result in posthumous restlessness of the corpse. Cindy Wood focuses on one person, William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester (ep. 1366–1404), and his long-lasting preparations, including a variety of intercessory options for the benefit of his soul. Mia Korpiola, in turn, analyses deathbed confessions in the context of the Northern medieval and early modern legal system. Dominika Burdzy discusses the concern for salvation in Lesser Poland scrutinising particularly the Catholic traditions of the early modern period. The next three chapters focus on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant culture as Anu Lahtinen discusses deathbed accounts and Otfried Czaika analyses the problem of dying unprepared in the light of early modern funeral sermons. Finally, Riikka Miettinen brings forward the problem of suicide, and the chances of suicidal persons to somehow prepare and atone for a death that was considered a horrid act, a serious sin, and a punishable felony.



The book ends with Bertil Nilsson's concluding and methodological remarks on the topic of preparing for death in Northern Europe. He especially considers the religious transitions of the period: first from paganism to Christianity and later, the Reformation, which influenced profoundly the whole region. The chapters of the volume discuss and comment on the Northern cultural adaptations of the Christian teachings on death, informed as they are of the general process of cultural interaction, which Robert Bartlett famously called "the Europeanization of Europe."<sup>10</sup> In the medieval period, the Northern societies adopted new ways of organizing their culture. Along with the Christian faith arrived, little by little, Church organisations, canon law, new ways of using arts and crafts to serve the Church, a new kind of alphabet, literacy, and the use of Latin as the European *lingua franca*. Preparations for death must be analysed in the context of the aforementioned lengthy, partly incomplete process of Europeanisation that had a different pace and forms in, say, Iceland, Poland, or Sweden.<sup>11</sup> Then again, as far as the Reformation period is concerned, it must be born in mind how the competing teachings of the Catholic and Protestant Churches created new meanings and boundaries.

This book will deal with the consequences that Christianisation and, later, the Reformation had in regard to how people understood death and how they wanted to prepare for their departure. Thanks to the common ecclesiastic organization and its emphasis on certain documentation, there are sources such as last wills and funeral sermons that can be used for comparison over time and space. Then again, some sources and phenomena, such as the saga descriptions or court documents focusing on deathbed confessions, reflected local characteristics special for one society.

While some previous monographs have discussed related topics, their geographic range is narrower and their attention has often been on the theory of *ars moriendi* or the time after a person's death (for example, burials or funeral sermons). Moreover, the studies have often had a more limited scope, as for example on medieval and post-medieval burials, and many of them have been directed to local audiences and written in Scandinavian languages or in Finnish.<sup>12</sup> This volume, however, focuses on preparations and how practical

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10 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change* (London, 1993).

11 The Swedish Realm also included the area of the present-day Finland, thus, when Sweden is mentioned in general in this volume, it refers to the area of both Finland and Sweden.

12 Bertil Nilsson, *Kvinnor, män och barn på medeltida begravningsplatser*, (Projektet Sveriges kristnande) 3 (Uppsala 1994); Tuija Tuhkanen, "In memoriam sui et suorum posuit:" *Lahjoittajien muistokuvat Suomen kirkoissa 1400-luvulta 1700-luvun lopulle* (Turku, 2005);

problems and economic issues got intertwined and sometimes overshadowed the ideals of *ars moriendi*. Its chapters analyse the complicated everyday level, using a variety of written sources, and give new insights on the everyday solutions people had to adopt.

### Changing Relations between the Living and the Dead

One important change brought over time was the change in the relations between the living and the dead – or the loosening of the relation between them. For medieval Icelanders, the consequences of death were not quite the same as what was taught by the Catholic Church. The dead were mainly just deceased members of the society resting peacefully in their graves awaiting the Day of Judgement. However, sometimes the dead could become either a threat or an asset to the living – especially if the corpses became posthumously restless after their burial. Not only spirits, but also the bodies could thus return to interact with the living. Kanerva examines saga texts that were written in the thirteenth and in the early fourteenth century. She reads the sagas intertextually in order to discover how medieval Icelanders thought it was best to prepare for death, both from the perspective of the dying and from the perspective of the living, in order to prevent the appearance of the malevolent restless dead.

As Kanerva points out, preparations do not necessarily always refer to certain rituals but also include the attitudes, actions, and behaviour of both the dying person and of those she would be leaving behind. Because of differences in the concepts of the mind and the soul, of which the latter was adopted by Christianity whereas the former was a more indigenous one, the preparations for death without posthumous activity – a “Good Death” especially from the perspective of the living – sometimes necessitated proper actions and behaviour after the death, as well. Both “normal” dying people, who were not

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Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsförberedelse*; Stenberg, *Döden dikterar*; Kristina Jonsson, *Practices for the living and the dead: Medieval and post-Reformation burials in Scandinavia* (Stockholm, 2009); Maria Kallio, “*Lupaas lahjasta, toivo täyttymyksestä*” – *keskiaikaiset testamentit Turun hääpakunnassa*. Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Turku, 2011. Some Nordic cases are also discussed in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, a special issue of *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/journal/volumes/volume\\_18/Death%20and%20Dying%20in%20Medieval%20and%20Early%20Modern%20Europe.pdf](http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/journal/volumes/volume_18/Death%20and%20Dying%20in%20Medieval%20and%20Early%20Modern%20Europe.pdf), last accessed 25 Aug. 2017; Rasmussen and Flaeten, eds., *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*.

expected to and did not express any posthumous activity, and those who became restless after their deaths are discussed in order to compare the differences in what kind of preparations were successful and what could go wrong.

The medieval Catholic doctrine did not see the dead quite as active members of the society as the Icelanders and many other traditional societies had done. Nevertheless, death did not cut all interaction between the living and the dead. The religious doctrine of individual responsibility of sin and the preparations of the soul for afterlife influenced many areas of medieval life and death in a profound way. The ideal religious preparations for death were thus very much focused on whether the dying had atoned her or his sins. Thus, a Good Death required proper valedictory rituals, confession, absolution, and extreme unction, in the presence of family and friends.

Because salvation was partly based on deeds and donations, a person could prepare for afterlife making donations and bequeathing property to the Church. Even after the death, the living could help their dead relatives with prayers and donations, lessening their torments in purgatory. As Cindy Wood observes in this volume, “purgatory was widely understood and expected, thus there was an imperative during life to respect the wishes of the dead and to plan for their own demise as far as financial resources allowed.”<sup>13</sup> In the words of Georges Duby, whose comment describes the French medieval society but is applicable also elsewhere, “everything possible was done to see that their souls did not suffer, so that they would not trouble the living.”<sup>14</sup>

The chapters written by Cindy Wood and Dominika Burdzy revolve around the concern for salvation. Cindy Wood analyses these preparations and how they reflected the belief in the power of prayers – especially the mass – in relieving the trials of the cleansing fire in purgatory, the space between death and the day of Final Judgement. This case study concentrates on William Wykeham, one of the richest late medieval bishops in northern Europe, and Wood depicts how he made the most of it – for the benefit of the community as well as for his own salvation.

As Wood shows, Wykeham prepared for his death and the necessary intercession to relieve some of his suffering in purgatory during his lifetime as a long-term project, not as a deathbed imperative. Prayers for the dead were an important feature of late medieval life and were available to the population in

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13 Cindy Wood in this volume.

14 Georges Duby, “Communal Living,” in *A History of Private Life 2: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988) [orig. *Histoire de la vie privée, 2: De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance*, 1985], pp. 35–85, here p. 83.

a variety of ways. Chantry were the most common religious foundation at the time of Wykeham. These endowed masses benefited the souls of the founders after death. While asking friends and religious institutions for prayers in return for gifts of money, he was not reliant on these only, as his career as bishop involved a program of intercessory foundations with a focus on education – especially for paupers. What was special here was the scale, enabled by his large income from his role as bishop of Winchester. The case of Wykeham illustrates the powerful and, at least for some, also problematic relation between wealth, donations, and salvation.

In “The Concern for the Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century,” Dominika Burdzy uses wills as her main source. Burdzy discusses how the fear of death, expected or sudden, influenced people’s attitudes and behaviour as they wanted to secure peace and salvation for the soul as well as remembrance after death. Writing one’s last will was very often part of preparing for a good death and securing the afterlife. Wills were instruments for “settling the soul” as well as instruments for “settling the estate.” Before death, people wanted to make sure they had done everything for the salvation of their souls. Through their last will, people were able to demonstrate their faith before their death and pave their way to an eternal life.<sup>15</sup>

Burdzy focuses on wills in which testators left records *ad pia opera* and instructions for the executors of the will on how to fulfil their last wishes. If the obligations were not fulfilled, the executors were subject to legal responsibility. According to their financial capability, the townspeople, as well as the urban clergy and nobility, tried to ensure commemoration and prayers after death by bequeathing money for anniversary masses and foundations of Church institutions which were obliged to celebrate masses in the name of the founder.

Chapels, altars, tombs and graves, epitaphs, various liturgical vestments, and paraments donated to temples in exchange for prayers are the visible traces of the care for remembrance. The foundations of various institutions, such as altars in churches, were equally important, as the beneficiaries were obliged to celebrate a certain number of Masses for the benefactors and their heirs. Some of the altars were linked to so-called “predicatories” (*predykatury*), i.e. benefices that obliged the priest to preach on specific dates. This way, the testators

15 Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l'au-delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age (vers 1320 – vers 1480)*, (Collection de l'École Française de Rome) 47 (Rome, 1980), esp. pp. 212–29, 389–425, and 434–35; Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), p. 33; Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *Death and Property in Siena, 1205–1800: Strategies for the Afterlife*, (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Sciences) 106:2 (Baltimore and London, 1988), p. 247.

also assured regular preaching and teaching of the catechism for urban communities. Interestingly, Burdzy points out a local custom that while altars and chapels had patron saints, they were commonly named after their founders.

As is shown in the cases studied by Burdzy, preparing for death also meant preparations for an afterlife in the memories of the community. These kinds of multiple purposes can be considered representative for the afterlife strategies in the medieval and early modern period, both in the Catholic and Reformation context. Already before the Reformation, the importance of having one's figure and name immortalised or at least perpetuated could be seen in the masses and in the portraits of the donors, as Tuija Tuhkanen has previously shown in the context of the Swedish realm.<sup>16</sup> Many needs and projects could also be intertwined. When the noble couple Lucia Olofsdotter Skälge and her husband Henrik Klasson Djäkn donated and bequeathed their property to the new Brigittine convent of Naantali (Sw. Nådendal, Lat. *Vallis gratiae*) in the mid-fifteenth-century, they were possibly trying to find help for their childlessness as well as help their own souls and that of the deceased parents of Henrik whose father had allegedly been guilty of murdering his wife. In addition, the donations and bought masses worked as a public demonstration of the pious aims of the couple.<sup>17</sup>

Preparing for death was not only a matter regulated by the Church but could also involve the law. This aspect is analysed by Mia Korpiola in her article "At Death's Door: Deathbed Confessions and the Law in Medieval and Early Modern Sweden." Deathbed confessions were considered to have special credibility and weight in legal practice despite some criticism levelled at the practice. When a person was at death's door and confessed to claims and debts in the presence of witnesses, this had special weight, and the witnesses later appeared in court to testify of the words of the dying. Similarly, deathbed confessions were used for establishing the cause of death and guilt for homicide. The confessions of criminals who were to be executed were also used as evidence of acquitting possible accomplices of suspicion.

Mia Korpiola points out that, legally, the deathbed confessions became especially important in Swedish legislation because of the backwardness of the country. In the north, there was only partial reception of the learned doctrine

16 Tuhkanen, "In memoriam sui et suorum posuit."

17 On Lucia and her donations, see Elina Räsänen, "Agency of two Ladies: Wellborne qvinnarna Lucia Olofsdotter and Veneration of Saint Anne in the Turku Diocese," in *Les élites nordiques et l'Europe occidentale (XIIe–XVe siècle)*, eds. Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen and Élisabeth Mornet (Paris, 2007), pp. 245–61. On the fate of the parents of Henrik Djäkn, see Kustavi Grotenfelt, ed., *Jaakko Teitin valitusluettelo Suomen aatelista vastaan v. 1555–1556* (Helsinki, 1894), p. 24.

of evidence, and using a deathbed confession was one of the strategies used for resolving difficult court cases in default of any decisive evidence. Even though the witnesses had not been present at the actual event, they could at least witness what the dying person had claimed. The role of deathbed confession in Swedish law and practice also goes to show how important preparations for death were for medieval and early modern people. This applied to debt, ownership, and possession of property at large as well as to guilt for homicide and other crimes. Ecclesiastical doctrine and deathbed practices came to shape the actions of people to the extent that they also became written down and codified in law. At the same time, the deathbed confession also served as a way for the dying person to settle their accounts with the community and God, smoothing the way to salvation. Thus, again we find the material, economic, and the religious aspects of preparations intertwined.

One of the important changes brought by the Reformation was that most of the Northern societies abandoned the idea of intercession. The previous close connection between the dead and the living was cut. Now, the focus was more on showing off one's piety for the afterworld. For some persons, like the Swedish nobleman Henrik Fleming (of the Manor of Lehtis, 1584–1650), the preparations for death evolved into an almost kingdom-wide project of financing church buildings and interiors, from Stockholm, the capital of the kingdom, to less known rural areas. In addition, for Henrik Fleming, the preparations also included an explanation of how his funeral was expected to take place.<sup>18</sup>

Theological perceptions related to death had also altered because of the Reformation. The Protestant Reformers not only denounced as unbiblical the doctrine of purgatory, but also the limbo of infants (*limbus infantium*), the place where the souls of small unbaptised children resided. These infants were tainted by the original sin although they were too young and innocent to have committed sins of their own.<sup>19</sup> By doing this, the Protestant Reformers altered “the geography of afterlife” (*géographie de l'au-delà*) in the words of Jacques Le Goff.<sup>20</sup> But even more importantly for our topic, it altered attitudes towards the death and salvation of small children – accordingly also the spiritual preparations for their death. As Otfried Czaika concludes in his article in this volume, the turning from man to God, but also from the individual to the collective,

18 Tuija Tuhkanen, *Kirkon kaunistukseksi ja lahjoittajan kunniaksi: Henrik Flemingin lahjoitukset Suomen kirkoissa*, (Historiallisia tutkimuksia) 238 (Helsinki, 2008).

19 Peter Marshall, “The Map of God's Word: Geographies of the Afterlife in Tudor and Early Stuart England,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 110–30, here pp. 112–16.

20 Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), p. 10.

as the focal point of justification, changed the perception of dying children. Being part of the community of all believers for the entirety of one's life was more important than any special preparations on the deathbed. Thus, not even small children or unborn infants were considered to have died unprepared. In practice, the original sin was downplayed and small children increasingly seen as innocents. This is also reflected in funeral customs. New archaeological evidence shows that at least in some regions of the Swedish realm, it became customary to bury small infants, regardless of sex, with flower wreaths on their heads to symbolise their purity.<sup>21</sup>



ILLUSTRATION 1.1 *This posthumous portrait of Hannibal Gustav Wrangel was in all likelihood painted in Germany*

The portrait belongs to the collection of Skokloster Castle, and it as well as information related to it can be accessed online through Wikimedia Commons at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porträtt\\_av\\_Hannibal\\_Wrangel\\_på\\_lit\\_de\\_parade\\_-\\_Skoklosters\\_slott\\_-\\_13736.tif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porträtt_av_Hannibal_Wrangel_på_lit_de_parade_-_Skoklosters_slott_-_13736.tif), last accessed 25 August 2017.

21 Henrike Kallio, "Röntgentekniikka paljasti, miten lapset alettiin nähdä Suomessa viattomina 400 vuotta sitten," *Kaleva*, 31 Oct. 2016, online at <http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/>

The same is also reflected by visual evidence. The posthumous portrait (See Illustration 1.1) of little Hannibal Wrangel (1641–43) lying on his *lit-de-parade*, commissioned by his distraught aristocratic parents, shows the infant, dead at the age of one year and 16 weeks, in brilliantly white clothes and a wreath on his head. Hannibal Wrangel had been taken to the house of the renowned physician Johann Eler, doctor of philosophy and medicine, probably to receive best possible medical attention. Hannibal's parents struggled to save his life, and whether they undertook any preparations for his potential death is unknown. The demise of the little boy in the physician's house in Lüneburg was described as placid. The certainty of their infant's salvation – as observed by Czaika in his analysis of funeral sermons – must have comforted the bereaved parents regardless of any preparations they may or may not have undertaken. They surely consoled themselves with the thought, expressed also in the painting of their dead son, that at his death he had been transported by angels to heaven.<sup>22</sup>

### Achieving a Good Death, Despite Everything?

Several chapters in this volume deal with sudden and violent deaths and the ways people were trying to make the best out of these deaths, whether resulting from an unexpected fit, a cruel homicidal assault, the executioner's blade or even suicide. As can be seen, however, even in many extreme cases, people did not completely give up their hope of salvation; they still strove to follow at least some rules of the Good Death available to them.

It is natural that when thinking of preparations for death, one will naturally first and foremost think of the very moment of death and its imminent presence. However, as was shown by Wood's analysis on Wykeham and as is emphasised by Otfried Czaika in this volume, preparing for death could actually be seen a life-long process. In the early modern period, preparations for death were habitually described in the *personalia* parts of funeral sermons and followed a quite narrow narrative. The *personalia* most often presented the life course of the deceased, putting emphasis on the pious life, family life, good guidance, and the example given by the deceased person, ending with

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kotimaa/rontgentekniikka-paljasti-miten-lapset-alettiin-nahda-suomessa-viattomina-400-vuotta-sitten/742045/, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

22 Hannibal Gustav Wrangel af Salmis was the firstborn of the Swedish Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel af Salmis and Anna Margareta von Haugwitz. On Johann(es) Eler, see G. Matthiä, "Schluß des Entwurfs einer Geschichte der Arzneykunst in den Braunschweig-Lüneburgischen Landen," *Hannoversches Magazin* 57, 15 July 1768, cols. 897–910, here col. 900.



a deathbed scene. For his analysis, Czaika has selected Swedish funeral sermons from the seventeenth century that have been held on the occasion in which someone had died an unprepared death. In his contribution, Czaika takes a fresh look at how the authors of Swedish funeral sermons dealt with these seemingly unexpected deaths and how the argumentation of sermons reflected the *vera doctrina* of Lutheranism.

Studying the topic of dying unprepared in early modern Swedish funeral sermons, Czaika draws some unexpected yet convincing conclusions. While a sudden, unexpected death was, in theory, often considered as a sign of perdition, the preachers discussing an unexpected death did not, after all, see a theological problem in the lack of deathbed preparations. Instead, preparations for death were presented as a sum of the Christian life. As the whole life should have been lived as a preparation for death, this last preparation can be considered as a facultative moment. This reflects the doctrinal aspects of Lutheranism, which does not regard human activity as important for salvation. God's grace was present during the entire life of a person and not only in special moments of life like the deathbed.

Anu Lahtinen draws partly similar conclusions in her analysis on a number of accounts of men and women of high nobility preparing for their deaths in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Sweden. Using deathbed descriptions and similar reports, Lahtinen's chapter sheds light on both peaceful and violent departures. Lahtinen shows how the dying person was often presented as excelling in the *ars moriendi* by accepting her or his death, turning to the afterlife supported by pious prayers, bidding her or his fellow Christians farewell, and finally departing in God's grace. This was in accordance with the traditional ideal. Attention was also paid to the preparations of an honourable burial, an essential part of a good death.<sup>23</sup>

In her contribution, Lahtinen presents many cases in which the death was not, after all, a successful process but a sudden, violent event. However, even these descriptions depict the dying person aspiring for as good a death as was possible in the circumstances. People could, for instance, be presented as following the lines analysed by Otfried Czaika. They did not die unprepared as such, as they had been living their lives in a pious way, which was itself a preparation, having for example led a good life and having listened to a pastor's sermon before their sudden death. Even people facing a politically motivated execution were doing their best to prepare themselves – both spiritually and

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23 See also Anu Lahtinen, "A Nobleman's Death: Power Struggle and Resistance in Accounts of a Political Execution in Early Modern Sweden," in *Rebellion and Resistance*, ed. Henrik Jensen (Pisa, 2009), pp. 33–49.

socially – by meeting the priest, trying to make sure that they would get an honourable funeral, and taking final leave of their families.

Anu Lahtinen also pays special attention to the social aspects of preparing for one's death. Dying was not simply a personal matter between a noble person, God, and the closest family members. A noble death and the accounts of it had political, economic, and social consequences, most strikingly during the times of political turmoil that hit Sweden in the turn of the seventeenth century. Even in more peaceful times, economic or tactical issues were at stake, and they could also be referred to in deathbed accounts. Lahtinen also discusses the afterlife of the descriptions of these preparations, pointing out how the family members were active in constructing, maintaining, and distributing the descriptions.

Riikka Miettinen, again, takes the analysis of a violent death one more step further in her analysis “Lord, have mercy on me’: Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden.” As elsewhere in Europe of the time, suicide was considered a horrid act that was both a serious sin and a punishable felony in the early modern Swedish Realm. This was especially so in seventeenth-century Sweden, an era characterised by Lutheran Orthodoxy, confessionalisation, and severe official and popular attitudes towards moral and religious violations. The authorities taught that killing oneself inevitably destined one's soul to hell without the possibility of salvation. Furthermore, suspicious deaths were investigated in public trials and the corpses of classified suicides could be punished and even desecrated with deviant burials.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, people committing suicide were very concretely preparing for their deaths, too – and as Miettinen's analysis shows, they were not totally devoid of the hope of receiving some divine mercy.

The chapter discusses the ways early modern Swedish people had for preparing themselves and others for suicide, with a particular focus on religious crises and spiritual preparations related to the suicides. Riikka Miettinen points out that at least some of the would-be suicides showed considerable concern about spiritual matters. Several had already suffered from feelings of despair, doubts over their personal salvation, and religious melancholy that had led them to either call upon priests and piety or to turn their backs on God. Based on their expressed worries over salvation and feelings of the unbearable weight of a guilty conscience as well as frequent church attendance and personal prayer, many were clearly troubled in the face of their

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24 On suicide as a cultural phenomenon and as a crime, see Riikka Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Praxis in the Lower Courts* (Tampere, 2015).

desire to end their earthly existence. Devout individuals encountered a serious religious and moral dilemma which some of them attempted to solve by unorthodox interpretations of God's word and mercy.

Interestingly, a large number of the suicides were described as having been to Church or to a priest, confessed their sins, and received Communion very recently or on the day of their death. Some also clearly made private spiritual preparations. Thus, Miettinen shows that regardless of the mainstream Lutheran theological views on the destiny of a suicide's soul, some of the would-be suicides kindled a hope that they might still receive God's mercy as they attempted to follow the Christian tradition and at least some of the precepts of the ideal *ars moriendi*. Furthermore, research on indirect forms of suicide, namely suicidal murders and crimes of bestiality that were either committed or falsely confessed solely in order to receive a death sentence, shows that fretting over salvation was prevalent among suicidal but devout Christians. As convicted criminals, they could die as penitents and receive most of the rituals before their execution – unlike suicides, which was clearly a crucial issue for them.<sup>25</sup>

The spiritual preparations among would-be suicides indicate a continuity of the great significance of Christian practices and procedures related to a Good Death and “dying well” in early modern Sweden. Moreover, the spiritual crises and preparations among the would-be suicides as well as the occurrence of the peculiar and indirect forms of suicide manifest the diverse and heterogeneous religious views in an era characterised by official religious uniformity. Alongside the preparations among the suicidal, the era's religious literature and deathbed and burial practices manifest the continued importance given to one's last moments, repentance and manner of death. Even the suicides did not necessarily die spiritually unprepared; though some possibly ignored the issue, most probably pondered their fate in the afterlife and either made their peace with God or accepted the official views on their act and destiny.

Studying different aspects of preparations for death, the authors of this volume can be seen to question any too simplistic interpretations of the cultures in the past. This volume does not only discuss the practices and beliefs of medieval and early modern elites, but also elucidates the experiences of the common people when preparing for death and afterlife. As Bertil Nilsson argues in his concluding chapter of his volume, this is a field where more work needs to be done, regardless of the scarcity of sources. When the focus is not on major literary or theological authorities, more nuances and variations can

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25 E.g. Tyge Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague: Murdering to Die in the Eighteenth Century*, (Studies in Central European Histories) 55 (Leiden, 2012).

be seen in the individual and local responses to the inevitability of death and the uncertainty of the time of death. Among the most important observations, then, are how unexpected situations were, all in all, placed under the umbrella of aspiring for a good death. Another important observation is the social dimension of the preparations for death as reported by eyewitnesses, the family, and the local community. As Mia Korpiola points out in her analysis, while the individual acts were left to the dying person to do her- or himself, the priest and the community acted as prompters and witnesses on the way to Heaven.

# Restless Dead or Peaceful Cadavers? Preparations for Death and Afterlife in Medieval Iceland<sup>1</sup>

*Kirsi Kanerva*

## Introduction

In the medieval ecclesiastical tradition, preparation for death was largely a matter of enabling salvation of the soul and its state in the spiritual afterlife. It was important to receive absolution of one's sins and the proper sacraments before breathing the last breath, which ensured burial in consecrated ground. In medieval folk beliefs, however, preparations for death could occasionally be crucial for the physical afterlife of corpses also, and, as a consequence, for the wellbeing of those who outlived the deceased. In this chapter, I will concentrate on preparations for death and afterlife on the medieval periphery, in thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Iceland, where the process of Christianisation had started in year 1000. I will discuss folk beliefs that were still endorsed by ordinary people concerning the influence of death rituals or the lack of them on the possible afterlives of corpses as revenants.<sup>2</sup>

Medieval Icelandic Family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*), which will be the main sources used here, occasionally mention dead people who did not rest peacefully in their graves, but appeared to the living in their physical, recognisable bodies. As suggested in earlier studies, the dead usually returned if they were motivated to do so: that is, if they had some unfinished business or the living had shaken the social equilibrium and had to be reminded of the norms they had broken. Some of the reanimated dead acted benevolently towards the living, but many of them were malicious and harmful. They could, for instance, cause death, fear, madness, and illness in those who were not mentally

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- 1 I thank the editors and co-writers of this anthology for their valuable comments that helped me to improve the article, and Philip Line for revising my English, as well as for his helpful advice. This research has been undertaken as part of the Mind and the Other -project funded by the Academy of Finland's Research Program Human Mind, 266573.
  - 2 I will not discuss here the methods that have been used to banish and destroy the restless dead in sagas and thus, to end the posthumous restlessness, since they have been thoroughly reported in earlier studies. See, e.g. the works mentioned in footnote 3 below.

or physically strong enough to resist their posthumous influence. Especially those of the deceased who had been strong-willed in life and who were often thought to possess special skills could return posthumously of their own free will – although some of them remained peaceful as well. The medieval conceptions of posthumous restlessness have been discussed in great depth in earlier studies, but the emphasis has been on the state of affairs after death.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, in this article, to broaden the picture of the phenomenon and its relation to Christian beliefs, I will concentrate also on the circumstances prior to death: preparations that contribute to the prevention or realisation of the potential to become posthumously restless.

Bearing the earlier studies in mind, I will focus here on preparations for death and afterlife made by and for people who were considered strong-willed and accordingly had the potential to become revenants should the need for posthumous activity arise in medieval Icelandic sagas. I understand preparations to mean the making of arrangements for death and afterlife as well as acts and processes of putting the dying person into a suitable state in afterlife. I will conduct three case studies where I discuss the death, burial, and possible afterlife of obviously strong-willed but presumably already elderly people in two *Íslendingasögur*: *Eyrbyggja saga*, written around 1262,<sup>4</sup> and *Laxdæla saga*,

3 See, e.g. Kjartan G. Ottósson, *Fróðárundur í Eyrbyggju*, (Studia Islandica) 42 (Reykjavík, 1983); Vésteinn Ólason, "The Un/Grateful Dead: From Baldr to Bægifótr," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, (The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization) 14 (Odense, 2003), pp. 153–71; Arnved Nedkvitne, *Mötet med döden i norrön medeltid*, trans. Bo Eriksson Janbrink (Stockholm, 2004); Ármann Jakobsson, "The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic Draugr and Demonic Contamination in *Grettis Saga*," *Folklore* 120 (2009), pp. 307–16; Ármann Jakobsson, "Íslenskir draugar frá landnámi til lúterstrúar: Inngangur að draugafræðum," *Skírnir* (2010), pp. 187–210; Ármann Jakobsson, "Vampires and Watchmen: Categorizing the Medieval Undead," *Journal of English and German Philology* 110 (2011), pp. 281–300; Kirsi Kanerva, "The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of *Eyrbyggja saga*," *Collegium Medievale* 24 (2011), pp. 23–49; Kirsi Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland," in *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy and Power in Medieval Society*, eds. Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola, and Tuija Ainonen, (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture) 12 (Berlin and Boston, 2013), pp. 205–27; Kirsi Kanerva, "Disturbances of the Mind and Body: Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland," in *Mental (Dis)Order in Later Medieval Europe*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Susanna Niiranen, (Later Medieval Europe) 12 (Leiden, 2014), pp. 219–42. See also Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago, 1998), p. 12.

4 On the saga, see Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, 2nd ed., (Kröners Taschenausgabe) 490 (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 216–17 and 412–13; Matthías

compiled circa 1250.<sup>5</sup> The cases include a death that is not followed by reanimation of the corpse, a sudden and unexpected death<sup>6</sup> that results in posthumous restlessness, and a “deviant death” (i.e. a death departing from the norm), in which the dying person specifically makes preparations to ensure he will be able to exercise his post-mortem influence on the district around his grave.

Reanimation of a corpse in the *Íslendingasögur* implies liminality: the dead are no longer living and as such are absent from human society, but they are still present as revenants.<sup>7</sup> Following the theory of Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957), becoming posthumously restless could indicate that the dead had not been properly separated from the living and thus incorporated in the group of the dead ancestors in the otherworld, which usually requires making proper preparations and performing the right rituals. Instead, they could be considered to remain in a liminal space from where they could still enter the world of the living.<sup>8</sup> Since the reanimated dead in sagas could be both malevolent

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Pórðarson, “Formáli,” in *Eyrbyggja saga*, eds. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, (Íslenzk Fornrit) 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), pp. v–xcvi, here p. lvii; John McKinnell, “Vatnshyrna,” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, 1993), pp. 689–90.

5 On the saga, see Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon*, pp. 244–45; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Formáli,” in *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, (Íslenzk Fornrit) 5 (Reykjavík, 1934), pp. v–xcvi, here pp. lxxvi–lxxx.

6 My definition of sudden death is a broad one: it refers to a death that occurs when the “natural” length of life (i.e. the length of life destined to a person) is interrupted by such sudden and unexpected incidents as illness or infection causing rapid fatality, killing, suicide, accident or other unanticipated factors, a view that has been common to many traditional cultures. See, e.g. definitions of sudden death, *mors repentina*, in Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1981), p. 10; Juha Pentikäinen, “Suomalaisen kansanperinteen ihmiskuva ja käsitys luonnosta,” in *Ihminen ja luonto*, ed. Auvo Kostiainen, (Historian perintö) 9 (Turku, 1983), p. 205. In this article, however, I have excluded such sudden deaths as suicide as I have already discussed the issue elsewhere, in Kirsi Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return? Suicide and Posthumous Restlessness in Medieval Iceland,” *Thanatos* 4:1 (2015), pp. 57–79.

7 On liminality, see Victor W. Turner, “Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage,” in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, eds. Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers (Palo Alto, Calif., 1985), pp. 46–55.

8 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago and London, 1960); Kaarina Koski, “Sosiaalinen kuolema,” in *Kuoleman kulttuurit Suomessa*, eds. Outi Hakola, Sari Kivistö, and Virpi Mäkinen (Helsinki, 2014), pp. 107–22, here pp. 108–09; D. Parkin, “Ritual,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* [e-book], eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 13368–71.

and benevolent in nature, it is beyond the scope of this article to define death that is followed by posthumous activity – consequently, liminality – as either strictly “good” or “bad.” Instead I will inquire into the preparation (if any) made for death and afterlife in the three listed cases, and from this assess what was expected to make the strong-willed deceased a liminal figure (i.e. a revenant) or a peaceful cadaver, in the context of medieval Icelandic beliefs and conceptions concerning posthumous restlessness and factors that were thought to enable the reanimation of corpses.

The sources used, *Íslendingasögur*, are anonymous and based on oral tradition about the ancestors of medieval Icelanders and their deeds. The *Íslendingasögur* describe events that took place in the period 870–1030 and tell of the people who settled the island (c. 870–930) and their descendants. However, the stories were first written down over two hundred years after the incidents they relate, mostly in the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries, by the Icelandic literary elite. Icelanders had been nominally Christian since their conversion in 1000. Therefore, the context of the *Íslendingasögur* could be considered “pagan,” but it should be borne in mind that although the family sagas were situated in the pagan past they may reflect the thirteenth and fourteenth-century Icelandic view of this pagan history – that is, the view of the writers. Consequently, *Íslendingasögur* will not be examined here as sources of pre-Christian ninth to tenth-century conceptions and beliefs. However, it is possible that the *Íslendingasögur* show traces of old beliefs that were still held in the thirteenth and early fourteenth-century culture. The change of religion in 1000 influenced the Icelandic worldview only gradually,<sup>9</sup> and the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century context in which the *Íslendingasögur* were written was not unequivocally Christian, as was typical for newly Christianised cultures in the North.<sup>10</sup> The old ways and beliefs – or lay views – that may be reflected in the *Íslendingasögur* were not necessarily completely forgotten, but continued to exist side by

9 Sverre Bagge, “Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005) 2, pp. 107–34.

10 For this medieval “syncretism” in northern European contexts shortly after conversion, see, e.g. Lauri Harvilahti, “Ethnocultural Knowledge and Mythical Models: The Making of St Olaf, The God of Thunder, and St Elijah During the First Centuries of the Christian Era in the Scandinavian and Baltic Regions,” in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, eds. Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, and Alexandra Bergholm, (Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces) 3 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 199–219; in Iceland in particular, see Carol J. Clover, “Icelandic Family Sagas,” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, (Islandica) 45 (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 239–315.



side with the new ones, including those that followed the Christian doctrine.<sup>11</sup> The views of people could be inconsistent and ambiguous, and they could differ from situation to situation, from individual to individual. Accordingly, in the Braudelian sense, the texts consist of various intertwined temporal layers.

Both the medieval audience of the sagas, which was fairly heterogeneous and included various social layers, and the writers presumably regarded the *Íslendingasögur*<sup>12</sup> as history that mostly recited true events. However, the writers of the *Íslendingasögur* could utilize the fluid oral tradition on which the stories of ancestors were based more freely than they would have if the oral stories had been written down shortly after the actual events, since no eyewitnesses remained to explain how things had actually been. Consequently, the writers of *Íslendingasögur* could shape the stories to some extent, for instance, according to the needs of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audience and commissioners of these sagas, and also embellish the stories with motifs that attracted the audience. However, they were also restricted by the oral tradition, since the places where various events had taken place and stories of the ancestors were well known.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the texts could reflect medieval Icelandic folk beliefs as well as views enhanced by the writers, but could also be embellished with native elements or foreign influences that were considered more appropriate or thought to make the story better. Here I have departed from the principle that literature may reflect the social reality in which it is produced but that it also shapes this reality and is shaped by it.

Accordingly, I expect that the *Íslendingasögur* may tell us something of the folk beliefs concerning the power of the dead to return that the thirteenth and fourteenth-century Icelanders held, although they were at least nominally Christian, and of the preparations that they thought needed to keep the dead who had been strong-willed in life peaceful in their graves. At the same time, the

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- 11 On the co-existence of popular beliefs and Christian doctrines concerning the dead in medieval Europe, see also Nancy Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, 2000), pp. 66–86, here pp. 67–68; Harvilahti, "Ethnocultural Knowledge and Mythical Models," p. 204.
  - 12 On *Íslendingasögur*, see Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavík, 1998); Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones, (Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature) 2 (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).
  - 13 See, e.g. Jesse L. Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: The Case of *Egils saga*," *Scandinavian Studies* 76 (2004) 3, pp. 299–316; Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, pp. 191–229.

texts may also have had didactic purposes or were intended as entertainment. Even as entertainment, they could influence the ideas people had of restless dead as a phenomenon (similar to our modern conceptions of e.g. vampires, which may be based on images adopted from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, *True Blood*, and other products of the modern film industry). As both *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* were compiled in Western Iceland,<sup>14</sup> it is possible that the sources reflect the beliefs and ideas of people who inhabited that particular area.

I will argue that, in the case of strong-willed people, preparations that ensured a peaceful afterlife involved taking care of worldly business and making certain that the deceased had no motivation to come back. A sudden death of a strong-willed person without the necessary preparation was believed to result in posthumous restlessness.<sup>15</sup> Preparations for a peaceful afterlife may not have ceased to be significant after death either, since the dead were expected to be conscious of their environment and the deeds that the living did after the death. This belief was based on the medieval Icelandic assumption that the minds of people survived death. As a result, the dead could still sense and have emotions that motivated and – as dynamistic forces – fuelled the reanimation of corpses that still possessed the might they had once had while they lived.

### Dying Prepared: Preservation of Social Equilibrium

I will begin by discussing the famous woman in *Laxdæla saga* called Unnr, who shares some characteristics with the restless dead figures, although she remains a peaceful cadaver in medieval sources. Firstly, the portrayal of Unnr's death resembles the scene of the death of the infamous saga revenant, Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga* (discussed in greater depth below) in that she was found dead, sitting in an upright position as if to manifest the firmness of her character in life.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the great size of Unnr mentioned in *Laxdæla saga*

14 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Formáli," pp. xxiii–xxxv; Matthías Þórðarson, "Formáli," pp. xliii–lvii.

15 Similar folk beliefs were also held in various areas of medieval and early modern Europe other than Iceland. See, e.g. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*. As I have argued elsewhere, not all sudden death resulted in posthumous activity. For instance, suicide, although it was also construed as a sudden death, would only have resulted in reanimation of the corpse if the person who committed suicide had a personality that was required from a revenant, that is if s/he was strong-willed and possessed the strength, motivation and energy to return. I have discussed suicide as a sudden death in greater depth in Kanerva, "Having no Power to Return?"

16 See, e.g. Sofie Vanherpen, "Remembering Auðr/Unnr djúp(a)uðga Ketilsdóttir: Construction of Cultural Memory and Female Religious Identity," *Mirator* 14:2 (2013), pp. 61–78, here p. 70. Another similar portrayal of the "uprightness" of a corpse can be found in *Egils*

raises suspicion. According to the saga, “[i]t is said that Unn[r] was both tall and heavy-set.”<sup>17</sup> In sagas, large women were often ascribed magic skills.<sup>18</sup> The abnormality of their size could be considered to transgress borders of gender or resemble the mythical giants who were well-known for their wisdom and knowledge of various vile arts. Apparently their physical strength also exceeded that of ordinary women.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that greater size and physical strength than other women was also thought to help them to control the supernatural powers that were sometimes employed in magic.<sup>20</sup> A woman’s great size could thus imply that she had special skills and, consequently, the capability to return posthumously.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the portrayal of Unnr is suggestive, but neither the saga nor other medieval sources indicate that she was involved in any posthumous activity.<sup>22</sup>

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*saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, (Íslenzk Fornrit) 2 (Reykjavík, 1933). See also Kanerva, “Rituals for the Restless Dead,” and below in the discussion, p. 29.

- 17 “*Svá segja men, at Unnr hafi verit bæði há ok þreklig.*” *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, (Íslenzk Fornrit) 5 (Reykjavík, 1934), pp. 1–248, here pp. 12–13. Trans. Keneva Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*, 5 vols. (Reykjavík, 1997), V, p. 6.
- 18 See, e.g. the figure of Þórgunna in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, (Íslenzk Fornrit) 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), pp. 139–40; Kjartan G. Ottósson, *Fróðárundur í Eyrbyggju*; Kanerva, “Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland”; Kirsi Kanerva, “‘Eigi er sá heill, er í augun verkir:’ Eye Pain as a Literary Motif in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century *Íslendingasögur*,” *ARV – Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69 (2013), pp. 7–35, here p. 14. See also Gro Steinsland and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Människor och makter i vikingarnas värld*, trans. Hans O. Sjöström (Stockholm, 1998), pp. 88–89.
- 19 In medieval Iceland, especially for men size and strength was an asset, since, along with high rank, physical vigour could occasionally facilitate wielding authority. See, e.g. Sverre Bagge, “From Fist to Scepter: Authority in Norway in the Middle Ages,” in *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy, and Power in Medieval Society*, eds. Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola, and Tuija Ainonen, (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture) 12 (Berlin and Boston, 2013), pp. 161–81, here pp. 161–62.
- 20 For comparison, see on the sorcerer known as *tietäjä* (literally “knower”) in preindustrial Finnic tradition in Laura Stark, *The Magical Self: Body, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*, (FF Communications) 290 (Helsinki, 2006), pp. 257, 262–66, 286–89, and 292–99, where she also discusses (p. 257) the “strength” and hard *luonto* (i.e. the “dynamistic force emanating from the human self and interacting with the environment”, italics original) of the *tietäjä* that was required from the *tietäjä*.
- 21 See, e.g. Þórgunna in *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 139–40, and footnote 18 above.
- 22 However, Sofie Vanherpen (“Remembering Auðr,” pp. 73–77) has pointed out that Unnr does express posthumous activity in later nineteenth-century folklore, stories which were apparently in circulation from the seventeenth century onwards, presumably even earlier. See also Kr. Kälund, ed., *Árni Magnússon: Brevveksling med Torfaeus* (Copenhagen,

The death of this powerful woman suggests that Unnr in *djúpúðga* (the Deep-Minded) knew about her impending death. Unnr had administered her property after both her husband and son had died while they were still living on the British Isles and now in Iceland. As she then got weary from old age (*gerðisk þá mjök ellimóð*), she wished to transfer the wealth to her grandson Óláfr feilan. The two of them discussed the arrangements for his marriage and the preparing of a great feast to which many of their relatives would come. According to the saga, she then stated: “as this will be the last feast I shall hold.”<sup>23</sup> Conforming to what Philippe Ariès regards as the typical pattern of medieval death, in which the individual anticipated and prepared for it as a transition to eternal life supported by the community (Ariès’s “tame death”), Unnr knew she would die.<sup>24</sup> Her preparations, however, appear to have consisted of taking care of the issues of the living instead of pondering the salvation of her own soul, and were fairly worldly in nature. Although Unnr was affected by her old age, her will was as strong as ever and she left none of her errands unattended:

Old age was tightening its grip on Unn[r]. She was not up and about until noon and retired to bed early in the evening. No one was allowed to consult her from the time she went to bed in the evening until she was dressed the next day. She replied angrily if anyone asked after her health. On the day the feast began [i.e. the wedding of Óláfr feilan took place]

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1916), p. 66; Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey*, (Yale Germanic Studies) 1 (New Haven, 1964), pp. 8–9. The activity is positive in nature, however, since it aims at helping the living and protecting them against evil, as if Unnr were a saint or a guardian spirit. This may be a result of Christian influence and was in accordance with, for instance, the writings of Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), whose texts were very popular in medieval Iceland and who, unlike Augustine of Hippo (354–430), accepted that the spirits of the dead saints and righteous people could return to help the living. John D. Martin, “Law and the (Un)Dead: Medieval Models for Understanding the Hauntings in *Eyrbyggja saga*,” *Saga-Book* 29 (2005), pp. 67–82, here pp. 69–70. On the texts of St. Gregory in Iceland, see Kirsten Wolf, “Gregory’s Influence on Old Norse-Icelandic Religious Literature,” in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, eds. Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, Kees Dekker, and David F. Johnson, (Mediaevalia Groningana: New Series) 4 (Paris, 2001), pp. 255–74. Unfortunately, there is no space here to discuss the apparent change in tradition in greater depth: of immediate concern to us is that in the Middle Ages people did not yet ascribe Unnr any posthumous restlessness.

23 “[...] því at ek ætla þessa veizlu síðast at búa.” *Laxdæla saga*, p. 11. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 5.

24 See Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 18.

Unn[r] slept longer than usual, but was up when the guests began to arrive and went out to give her friends and kinsmen a proper welcome.<sup>25</sup>

During the feast Unnr acted as the hostess and did not retire to her bower until she had made her last will known. In the presence of witnesses who validate her legal action, she announced that she wished to place the farm and all that it included in the hands of Óláfr feilan. Her final wish was a command and it was followed in full; Unnr's authority was never questioned.<sup>26</sup> After this, Unnr retired to her bower. People then continued feasting, but when the morning came, Óláfr feilan went to see his grandmother. According to the saga, "[a]s he entered the room, Unn[r] was sitting upright among the pillows, dead."<sup>27</sup>

The saga suggests that Unnr had died with no unfinished business; rather, she had taken care of all her errands before the final moment of death, which she appears to have known well in advance. Although Unnr was clearly old (perhaps even slightly physically weakened), she did everything in a proper manner and took care of all errands that she, the widow, as the head of the household, custodian of her grandchildren's paternal inheritance, and administrator of the farm, had to attend to.<sup>28</sup> She is represented as an exceptional person and, despite her mature age, she still possessed power and authority and did not tolerate denial or ignorance of her instructions and disliked those who questioned her health. Rather than being weak and powerless or dependent on somebody more mighty, she possessed authority and power in the Old Icelandic culture where, rather than distinguishing between gender, people made a distinction between able-bodied men and exceptional women who were bold, active, and vigorous (*hvatr*) and the soft, weak, and powerless (*blauðr*) who included "most women, children, slaves, and old, disabled

25 "Elli sótti þá fast at Unni, svá at hon reis ekki upp fyrir miðjan dag, en hon lagðisk snimma niðr. Engum manni leyfði hon at sækja ráð at sér þess á milli, er hon fór at sofa á kveldit, ok hins, er hon var klædd; reiðuliga svarar hon, ef nökkurr spurði at mætti hennar. Þann dag svaf Unnr í lengra lagi, en þó var hon á fótum, er boðsmenn kómu, ok gekk á mót þeim ok fagnaði frændum sínum ok vinum með sæmð." *Laxdæla saga*, p. 12. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 6.

26 *Laxdæla saga*, pp. 12–13.

27 "[...] er hann kom í stofuna, sat Unnr upp við hægindin; hon var þá önduð." *Laxdæla saga*, p. 13. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 6.

28 On the status, property, and power of widows, see Philadelphia Ricketts, *High-Ranking Widows in Medieval Iceland and Yorkshire: Property, Power, Marriage and Identity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, (*The Northern World*) 49 (Leiden, 2010), pp. 85–132, 196–211, 216–24, and 239–43.

or otherwise disenfranchised men.”<sup>29</sup> Unnr was an exceptional woman who belonged to the *hvatr* group. She was the revered ruler of the household until the very last moment:

[After announcing her last will] Unn[r] then rose to her feet and said she would retire to her bedchamber. She urged them to enjoy themselves in whatever way they saw fit, and the people could enjoy themselves with drink. [...] She walked briskly along the hall and people commented on her dignified bearing.<sup>30</sup>

The saga suggests that Unnr died well-prepared, an idea reminiscent of the ideal of good death that became defined in the *ars moriendi* literature from the fifteenth century onwards. The core knowledge of the medieval art of dying, however, was based on ideas of death, dying, and the afterlife that were already firmly established before these manuals intended specifically for practical guidance were compiled.<sup>31</sup> Older than the *ars moriendi* literature (which is discussed in greater depth in Mia Korpiola's chapter in this book), *Laxdæla saga* may not only reflect native ideas but also Christian notions of a good death, even if no special Christian rituals – absolution, sacraments, or burial in consecrated earth – are mentioned as taking place before the actual moment of death or after it.<sup>32</sup> Information on Unnr's religious orientation varies in sources. In some other sources Unnr is portrayed as a good Christian, but in *Laxdæla saga* nothing is mentioned of her conversion.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, in *Laxdæla*

29 Carol J. Clover, “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,” *Speculum* 68 (1993), pp. 363–87, here pp. 366, 369–71, and 380; see also Ármann Jakobsson, “The Specter of Old Age: Nasty Old Men in the Sagas of Icelanders,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104 (2005), pp. 297–325, here p. 306.

30 “Eptir þat stóð Unnr upp ok kvazk ganga mundu til þeirar skemmu, sem hon var vön at sofa í; það, at þat skyldi hvern hafa at skemmtan, sem þá væri næst skapi, en mungát skyldi skemmta alþýðunni. [...] hon gekk hart útar eptir skálanum; fundusk mönnum orð um, at konan var enn virðulig.” *Laxdæla saga*, pp. 12–13. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 6.

31 For the *ars moriendi* literature in the Scandinavian context in particular, see Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Uppsala, 2008); Stina Fallberg Sundmark, “Hyvä elämä, hyvä kuolema,” in *Hyvä elämä keskiajalla*, eds. Kirsi Kanerva and Marko Lamberg, (Historiallinen arkisto) 140 (Helsinki, 2014), pp. 35–64.

32 On the Christian rituals for a good death, see Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia, 1999), p. 81.

33 On this, see Vanherpen, “Remembering Auðr,” p. 62.

saga Unnr's burial was clearly a pagan burial, as she was "placed in a ship in the mound, along with a great deal of riches,"<sup>34</sup> while in the thirteenth-century *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* version) that describes the settlement period of Iceland around 870–930, Unnr expressed explicitly her wish to be buried at the floodmark because she did not want to be interred in unconsecrated ground, as the land was still pagan when Unnr was said to have died.<sup>35</sup>

None of these medieval versions of Unnr's death can be held as canonical, but as part of the multiform textual performances of the "immanent saga" of Unnr.<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that despite the contradiction between the pagan and Christian aspects in different sources, Unnr's death was a good death *with regard to her descendants*, since she not only became properly incorporated in the "lands of the dead" (be it in the pagan or the Christian sense) after her death,<sup>37</sup> but she also left behind social equilibrium. She forwarded her property

34 "[...] var lögð í skip í hauginum, ok mikít fé var í haug lagt með henni." *Laxdæla saga*, p. 13. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 6. On this burial, see also Vanherpen, "Remembering Auðr," p. 71.

35 Sofie Vanherpen discusses Unnr's burial at the floodmark (*í flæðarmáli*) in *Landnámabók* in greater depth in her article "Remembering Auðr," pp. 65–69. On the practice of burying people at the floodmark and ambiguities connected to it, see also Bertil Nilsson, *De Sepulturis: Gravrätten i Corpus Iuris Canonici och i medeltida nordisk lagstiftning*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 44 (Uppsala, 1989), p. 276; Anne Irene Riisøy, "Outlawry and Moral Perversion in Old Norse Society," in *Bodies of Knowledge: Cultural Interpretations of Illness and Medicine in Medieval Europe*, eds. Sally Crawford and Christina Lee, (BAR International Series) 2170 (Studies in Early Medicine) 1 (Oxford, 2010), pp. 19–26, here p. 23; Kanerva, "Having no Power to Return?"; Anne Irene Riisøy, "Deviant Burials: Societal Exclusion of Dead Outlaws in Medieval Norway," in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), pp. 49–81. Available online, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017, [http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/journal/volumes/volume\\_18/index\\_18.htm](http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/journal/volumes/volume_18/index_18.htm), p. 71.

36 See, e.g. Slavica Ranković, "The Performative Non-Canonicity of the Canonical: *Íslendingasögur* and Their Traditional Referentiality," in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, eds. Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, and Alexandra Bergholm, (Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces) 3 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 247–72. For the concept of immanent saga in particular, see Carol J. Clover, "The Long Prose Form," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986), pp. 10–39; Gísli Sigurðsson, "The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki," in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe) 18 (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 201–18.

37 Bearing in mind Unnr's saint-like posthumous activity in later folklore mentioned in Vanherpen, "Remembering Auðr," according to medieval Icelandic thought, she may have

to Óláfr feilan, a decision that was not disputed, and showed hospitality to all her friends who attended the wedding feast. No conflicts or unresolved issues remained to keep her alert in her grave. In effect, Unnr's last orders bear resemblance to the material concerns of the deathbed testimonies in medieval and early modern Sweden discussed by Mia Korpiola in her chapter, with the exception that Unnr did not appear to care for the salvation of her soul (unless remaining a peaceful cadaver is a condition that fulfills this aim), but concentrated on worldly matters. As Unnr knew she would die and that the feast she arranged would be her last, it can be suggested that Unnr was also making preparations for an afterlife in the memories of the community. Óláfr's wedding feast became Unnr's funeral feast – a splendid feast befitting a remarkable person. Her name and figure became perpetual, even immortal (also thanks to the story in the thirteenth-century saga), but unlike in early modern Poland discussed by Dominika Burdzy in her chapter, for instance, Unnr's afterlife is not represented as dependent on the posthumous prayers of her descendants or the prayers of the clerics, but on her own actions. Unnr was a highly respected person who followed the ethics of her day, and her good reputation remained as she passed away.

### Sudden Death: The Case of an Angry Revenant

Þórólfr bægifótr (Lame-foot) is, according to *Eyrbyggja saga*, a strong-willed individual (similar to Unnr), but also an unjust man whose difficult character in life suggests he was a potential ghost candidate.<sup>38</sup> The saga tells that he died a death that can be categorised as “sudden” in that he appears to have died during the night, unexpectedly as a consequence of strong emotional turmoil. In cases of sudden death, no proper preparations could be made in advance. In medieval Europe, sudden death had been regarded as a shameful death according to Philippe Ariès.<sup>39</sup> *Eyrbyggja saga* does not suggest that medieval Icelanders would necessarily have considered Þórólfr's sudden death shameful, but rather, it could be perceived as dangerous. Þórólfr died in an angry emotional state, since he had quarrelled with his son just before his death. After Arnkell, the son, had been informed of Þórólfr's death, he returned to his

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been incorporated in the group of saints and righteous people, who according to Gregory the Great could still return as spirits to help the living.

38 See also Kanerva, “Rituals for the Restless Dead.”

39 Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 10.



father's farm and performed special rituals for the corpse in order to prevent any kind of harm to the living.<sup>40</sup> According to the saga, Arnkell

told everyone to beware of walking in front of him [i.e. Þórólfr] until his eyes had been closed. Then Arnkel[l] took hold of [Þórólfr]'s shoulders [...] [After that] [h]e wrapped some clothes around [Þórólfr]'s head and prepared his body according to the customs of the time. After that he had the wall behind him broken down to drag the body outside.<sup>41</sup>

Oxen then transported the corpse, with a great struggle, to its burial place in the valley, and stones were heaped above Þórólfr Lam-foot's burial place. The rituals suggest that Þórólfr was expected to become restless after death,<sup>42</sup> and this was what happened, despite his son's rituals. After his death, Þórólfr Lam-foot remained peaceful only when his son was nearby. At other times, Þórólfr caused the living all sorts of physical and mental harm, including death and insanity.<sup>43</sup>

Because of these harmful activities, Arnkell transferred the corpse to a new burial place, but the dead father's strong will still appears to have influenced the selection of the second place for interment. Arnkell was forced to bury the corpse close to his own farm as Þórólfr Lam-foot's body became too heavy to carry for the two oxen and the men transporting it.<sup>44</sup> At first Þórólfr Lam-foot remained in this second mound, which was surrounded by a high wall (a physical obstacle to hinder the corpse from wandering), but when his son was later killed by his enemies, he returned to harass the living.<sup>45</sup> Because of the haunting, one of the killers of Þórólfr's son was forced to disinter the corpse anew and banish the dead Þórólfr by burning his undecayed body by the sea. When the corpse of Þórólfr was disinterred it was, according to the saga, "black as death and bulky as an ox" (*blár sem hel ok digr sem naut*).<sup>46</sup>

40 *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 90–92.

41 "[...] *bað hvern at varask at ganga framan at honum, meðan honum váru eigi nábjargar veittar; tók Arnkell þá í herðar Þórólfi [...] síðan sveipaði hann klæðum at höfði Þórólfi ok bjó um hann eptir siðvenju. Eptir þat lét hann brjóta vegginn á bak honum ok draga hann þar út.*" *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 92. Trans. Judy Quinn in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 173.

42 For a more thorough description and analysis of the rituals, see Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead," p. 215.

43 *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 93. See also Vésteinn Ólason, "The Un/Grateful Dead," p. 165.

44 *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 92–95.

45 *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 169.

46 *Blár* could indicate both "black" and "blue" colour. *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 169–70. The translation is my own.

The blackening and bloating of the body could be interpreted both as a representation of the condition of Þórólfr's soul in the Christian afterlife and as a contrast to hagiographic descriptions of the uncorrupted and beautiful bodies of saints when they were disinterred for translation to a new tomb. The latter case would represent a double parallel as Þórólfr's body was also being "translated" to a new burial place. Medieval saints' bodies often emitted a sweet odor and were uncorrupted through divine intervention.<sup>47</sup> The restless corpses in *Íslendingasögur* similarly fail to decompose, but unlike the bodies of saints, the corpse of Þórólfr is repulsive in appearance.

In the light of another thirteenth-century text, *Fóstbræðra saga*,<sup>48</sup> in medieval Iceland the condition might, however, have had a different explanation. The saga describes the lack of anger in a man when he hears that his father has been killed: "[...] he did not turn black because anger did not run into his bones."<sup>49</sup> This excerpt suggests that the blackness of Þórólfr's corpse indicated that he was angry. Since the blackness is pointed out during the second disinterment, it is possible that anger had run into his bones *after* his son's death (and presumably *because of it* as Þórólfr would be expected – although deceased – to get into "killing-mood" in the culture of feud<sup>50</sup>), as this change in colour is not mentioned during the first disinterment by his son Arnkell. At that time Þórólfr's corpse had "[...] not decayed but he was very hideous to look at."<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned above, Þórólfr had been angry when he died. In the *Íslendingasögur*, anger seems to be an emotion that causes posthumous restlessness if a person dies in such a state.<sup>52</sup> The question arises as to whether anger was considered something that could remain in the body after death and whether

47 Lena Liepe, *Den medeltida kroppen: Kroppens och könets ikonografi i nordisk medeltid* (Lund, 2003), pp. 50–52.

48 On the saga and its surviving manuscripts, see Gunnar Harðarson and Stefan Karlsson, "Hauksbók," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, 1993), pp. 271–72; Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, "Flateyjarbók," in *ibid.*, pp. 197–98; Paul Schach, "Fóstbræðra saga," in *ibid.*, pp. 216–19.

49 "[E]igi blánaði hann, því at honum rann eigi í bein reiði." *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, (*Íslensk Fornrit*) 6 (Reykjavík, 1943), pp. 119–276, here p. 128. The translation is my own.

50 On the culture of feud and the "killing-mood" in medieval Iceland, see William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990); William Ian Miller, "Emotions and the Sagas," in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock, 1992), pp. 89–110.

51 "[Ó]júinn, ok var hann nú inn lilligsti." *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 94–95. Trans. Quinn in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 174.

52 Vésteinn Ólason, "The Un/Grateful Dead." See also *Egils saga*, p. 174.

it might even increase with time (and if so, what was the nature of “anger”?). It is possible that the anger that Þórólfr had felt just before his death continued to exist in Þórólfr’s body when Arnkell disinterred him. Later something increased inside the corpse, however, and made the dead body heavier. As implied above, the saga tells us that the oxen that pulled the corpse to its new resting place became exhausted, after which the saga states: “[Þórólfr] was by now so heavy that they [i.e. the men who were transporting the corpse] could hardly manage to lift him at all.”<sup>53</sup>

The word used to describe the corpse, *þungr*, literally “heavy,” was often used in sagas to refer to an emotional condition.<sup>54</sup> Especially in concert with quietness (and the corpse was apparently quiet!), this “heavy” condition also implied anger. This kind of heaviness, however, does not seem to refer to a short-term state, as western cultures often define the emotion nowadays, but appears to indicate a longer term condition, a kind of mood or a long-lasting state of mind. If interpreted in this way, Þórólfr’s anger or angry mood that he experienced immediately before his death was presumably considered to have remained in his corpse. Still, as the corpse had become heavier than it was when it was buried for the first time and had grown blacker during the second re-interment, Þórólfr’s posthumous “mental condition” was apparently considered to have altered. The physiological change observed by the writer might thus indicate that Þórólfr had become angrier, even furious, during the time that he had spent in his grave.<sup>55</sup> His emotional state had changed for the worse after death – at least from the perspective of the living, since the somatic signs of his corpse forebode further posthumous activity.

In medieval Icelandic terms, according to which emotions were “movements of the mind” (*hugarhræringar*) and bodily in nature,<sup>56</sup> his mind, which was thought to exist in the breast, had moved, even though he was already dead.<sup>57</sup> Already angry when he died, he started to feel even angrier while lying

53 “[...] en Þórólfr var þá svá þungr, at þeir fengu hvergi komit honum talsvert.” *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 95. Trans. Quinn in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 174.

54 Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* [hereafter CGV] (Oxford, 1957), p. 749.

55 In the sagas, anger, like other emotions, could also be the cause of death if the emotional reaction was excessive.

56 For the materiality of the medieval Icelandic “mind,” see Kirsi Kanerva, *Porous Bodies, Porous Minds: Emotions and the Supernatural in the Íslendingasögur (ca. 1200–1300)*, (Turun Yliopiston julkaisuja, Sarja B, Humaniora) 398 (PhD diss., University of Turku, 2015).

57 The word for emotion was *hugarhræring*, which also literally means “movement of the mind.” The word is not frequently used in medieval sagas. See *hugarhræring* in *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, <http://onp.ku.dk>, last

in his grave after his son had been treacherously killed. His (increased) anger was manifested in another somatic form: anger had run into his bones and was revealed by the blackness of his corpse. This is in fact the response that would have been socially expected from the man whose father had been killed in *Fóstbræðra saga*; however, his body did *not* turn black, and this failure to react as he ought to was sufficiently notable to receive a specific mention.

In addition to the heaviness and blackness of Þórólfr's corpse, the saga also states that during the second re-interment his body is swollen (literally he is "bulky as an ox"). Swelling may refer to a condition similar to being heavy, and in both ancient medicine and medieval Icelandic understanding anger was thought to cause swelling of the body.<sup>58</sup> Regarding the physical changes in the corpse, it cannot be excluded that corpses buried in the Icelandic soil looked swollen and black if they were disinterred before the body had decomposed. Still, the saga authors were well accustomed to depicting emotional states through somatic changes,<sup>59</sup> which supports the view that this was the intention of the *Eyrbyggja saga* writer, even if it applied to physical appearance too, when he or she described the cadaver. The writer may have described the physical changes in the corpse in such a great detail expressly for the purpose of implying that it was full of anger.

Metaphorically speaking, swelling, as well as heaviness, also refers to a condition when the *amount of some substance in the body has increased* [emphasis added]. Expressions that appear metaphorical at first sight may, however, reflect the implicit medieval Icelandic model of anger, which was based on embodied experience and perception of one's own physiology.<sup>60</sup> In many cultures emotions are indeed conceptualised as substances in a container, that is, in the

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accessed 25 Aug. 2017. However, the implication that movement was integral to emotional states is further suggested by the use of the verb *bregða*, to move, in the description of such states. See *bregða* in CGV, pp. 77–78 and 291.

58 On anger as swelling in Old Norse-Icelandic and Old English languages, see Carolyn Larrington, "The Psychology of Emotion and Study of the Medieval Period," *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001) 2, pp. 251–56, here pp. 254–55; Kanerva, *Porous Bodies, Porous Minds*, pp. 101–05.

59 Miller, "Emotions and the Sagas," pp. 89–110; Larrington, "The Psychology of Emotion."

60 See also Stephen D. White, "The Politics of Anger," in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca and London, 1998), pp. 127–52, here p. 136; Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge, 2000). On emotion metaphors, see also William W. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), pp. 67–68.

body.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the quantity of the substance in the container may be expected to increase occasionally. Similarly in the medieval Icelandic context, a person could be full of anger (*fullr af reiði*)<sup>62</sup> or have fury in his or her bodily mind (*heipt í hug*).<sup>63</sup> In poetry we read of a man called Högni within whom, literally, the fury “swelled” (*bá svall heipt í Högna*),<sup>64</sup> that is, who was swollen with fury. Accordingly, in medieval Iceland anger was considered material in quality; a substance that could reside in the breast and make the body and skin bulge.<sup>65</sup>

This material quality of anger has interesting conceptual implications in that the posthumous anger of Þórólfr could be construed as an additional substance that remained and increased in quantity in the bodily container, especially if the role and function that the dead body was ascribed in medieval thought in general is considered.

Nancy Caciola, who has also examined some medieval Icelandic examples in her study of medieval European ghosts, has pointed out that a vitality of some sort that was expected to remain in the flesh was construed as an important component in the reanimation of the corpses. The body possessed this vitality as long as it was intact, or in other words, as long as there was flesh on the bones and the corpse had not decayed. The vitality was a kind of life-force that retained “energy still unexpended” (in Lester Little’s words, cf. Caciola) and thus enabled the posthumous restlessness of the corpse.<sup>66</sup> Vésteinn Ólason has likewise suggested that in medieval Iceland there was an indigenous view of some kind of life power and vitality that remained in the human body after death and caused restlessness, which he has defined as “a pagan relic.”<sup>67</sup> Such beliefs have been held in various cultural and historical contexts, and the power has often been exploited for both medical and magical purposes.<sup>68</sup>

61 On conceptual metaphors, see Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion*, pp. 146 and 192.

62 Magnus Rindal, ed., *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, (Norrøne tekster) 4 (Oslo 1981), p. 94.

63 D. Slay, ed., *Hrólfs saga kraka*, (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ: Series B) 1 (Copenhagen, 1960), p. 122.

64 *Ragnarsdrápa* in Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen, 1912–15), BI, p. 2.

65 See also Kanerva, “Disturbances of the Mind and Body”; Kanerva, *Porous Bodies, Porous Minds*.

66 On the life power in dead bodies in the medieval European context, see Nancy Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture,” *Past & Present* 152 (1996), pp. 3–45, here pp. 12–19 and 26–35.

67 Vésteinn Ólason, “The Un/Grateful Dead,” p. 167.

68 For e.g. preindustrial Finland, see Kaarina Koski, *Kuoleman voimat: Kirkonväki suomalaisessa uskomusperinteessä*, (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran toimituksia) 1313 (Helsinki,

The question remains: what role does anger, as a(n emotional) substance that remains within the corpse and occasionally increases in quantity, have in the belief in life forces or energies that reanimate the corpse and make it move? Although the example in *Eyrbyggja saga* does not give a clear answer to this question, it suggests that anger remained in the corpse of Þórólfr, increased in quantity and manifested itself in clear somatic changes that imply both change in the quantity of material anger and swelling within the bodily container. It cannot be excluded that anger was considered an essence that was partly responsible for the posthumous activity, an impetus that generated<sup>69</sup> the restlessness of the corpse, in other words its posthumous physical movements, which is what happens in Þórólfr's case. Consequently, anger could be regarded as a kind of life power, or at least an element of this vitality, or "energy" if such an anachronistic expression is allowed, that was thought to reanimate the corpses in medieval Iceland,<sup>70</sup> and an emotional state that prepared the body for restless afterlife.<sup>71</sup>

From the Christian perspective, anger was one of the cardinal sins, and was named as such in thirteenth-century Old Norse-Icelandic translations of

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2011), pp. 94–97. On the exploitation of this life power (or *spiritus*) in medieval and early modern medicine see P. Kenneth Himmelman, "The Medicinal Body: An Analysis of Medicinal Cannibalism in Europe, 1300–1700," *Dialectical Anthropology* 22 (1997) 2, pp. 183–203, here pp. 185, 192, and 195–97; Jari Eilola and Piia Einonen, "Peukalot silkkiäruvussa: Ruumis ja ruumiinjäsenet noituudessa ja taikuudessa," in *Makaaberit ruumis: Mielikuvia kuolemasta ja kehosta*, ed. Jari Eilola, (Historiallinen arkisto) 128 (Helsinki, 2009), pp. 185–240, here pp. 193–94.

69 For this energy as a kind of *mana*, see also Kjartan G. Ottósson, *Fróðárundur*; Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead"; Kirsi Kanerva, "From Powerful Agents to Subordinate Objects? The Restless Dead in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Iceland (ca. 1200–1400)," in *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed*, ed. Joëlle Rollo Koster London and New York, 2017, pp. 40–70, here p. 46.

70 Anger has indeed been construed as energy in other cultural contexts. For comparative cross-cultural examples of anger as energy, see also William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 56; Michelle Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*, (Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems) 4 (Cambridge, Eng., 1980). In the modern conception anger is often regarded as a motivating force and thus, energy. See, e.g. Henk Aarts, Kirsten I. Ruys, Harm Veling, Robert A. Renes, Jasper H.B. de Groot, Anna M. van Nunen, and Sarit Geertjes, "The Art of Anger: Reward Context Turns Avoidance Responses to Anger-Related Objects into Approach," *Psychological Science* 21 (2010) 10, pp. 1406–10.

71 This is not to suggest, however, that anger was the only reanimating element; the issue is discussed further elsewhere in Kanerva, "From Powerful Agents to Subordinate Objects?"

ecclesiastical and pseudo-historical works.<sup>72</sup> It is possible that in thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Icelandic culture, which was at least nominally Christian, anger was recognised as a cardinal sin which it was advisable to avoid if one wished to keep oneself from remaining in a liminal state, from where one would still be capable of visiting the world of the living. The text may echo views of a writer who wished to emphasise the rules of a medieval Icelandic emotional community<sup>73</sup> that followed the Christian concept of anger.

However, it should be noted that in Þórólfr's case the anger – if it was anger that reanimated his dead body – in his corpse was not only a negative thing: the power that remains and waxes in Þórólfr's corpse helps to restore social equilibrium after Þórólfr's son Arnkell is killed since Þórólfr, although dead himself too, manages to avenge his son posthumously. As one of Arnkell's killers burns Þórólfr's corpse the wind blows some ashes from the corpse onto a stone that is then licked by a cow. The cow is impregnated by the ashes and later gives birth to a bull that appears as a kind of doppelgänger of Þórólfr and slays the burner of Þórólfr's dead body and his son's killer.<sup>74</sup> Although from a Christian perspective a peaceful death free from anger may have been the ideal death, the Icelandic blood feud culture was in conflict with this model; dying angry enabled preservation of a vitality in the body that could later enable the strong-willed deceased to punish the living for their wrongdoings and restore social equilibrium.<sup>75</sup> In medieval Icelandic thought, anger could be either positive or negative; when it was used to maintain social equilibrium, it was good.<sup>76</sup>

To medieval Icelanders, the sudden death and posthumous restlessness of Þórólfr may have been neither "good" nor "bad," since the dead still had a role in the society of the living. It can be suggested that proper preparations

72 See, e.g. the Old Norse-Icelandic translations of the works of Alcuin (c. 735–804) from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Ole Widding, ed., *Alkuin: De virtutibus et vitiis: i norsk-islandsk overlevering og udvidelser til Jonsbogens kapitel om domme*, (Editiones Arnamagnæanæ: Series A) 4 (Copenhagen, 1960), pp. 108–09 and 121, and the thirteenth-century translation of Gautier de Châtillon's (1135–1201) *Alexandreis* made by the abbot of the Augustinian monastery in Þykkvabær (in 1247–62), Brandr Jónsson (died 1264), in *Alexanders saga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1925), p. 145.

73 On the concept of emotional community, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 2006).

74 *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 170–76, Ármann Jakobsson, "Íslenskir draugar frá landnámi til lúterstrúar." On the analysis of this incident, see Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead."

75 See also Kanerva, "The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland"; Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead," for the role of the dead in medieval Icelandic culture.

76 Kirsi Kanerva, "Hyvä ja paha viha," in *Hyvä elämä keskiajalla*, eds. Kirsi Kanerva and Mariko Lamberg, (Historiallinen arkisto) 140 (Helsinki, 2014), pp. 209–40.

for death – for instance, assuring that Þórólfr would not have died in an angry state of mind – would have prevented posthumous restlessness. But, as a consequence, the death of a respected member of the society, Arnkell, would not have been avenged as the sense of justice in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Iceland required (in spite of the views of the Church which considered anger a sin). In the saga, Þórólfr is prepared for posthumous activity, that is, an afterlife that was not in concordance with the official Christian doctrine. In effect, similar to the early modern cases discussed by Anu Lahtinen and Otfried Czaika in their chapters, Þórólfr's life itself was a preparation for his – in this case restless – afterlife, as his unjust character and malicious deeds in life, not only his sudden death, suggested he was a potential revenant. It is common for medieval Icelandic sagas in general that the personality of the character were permanent, and the protagonists do not “grow as human beings” – their personality simply did not change.<sup>77</sup> In the saga, Þórólfr is a bad person and remains one. It can be asked whether the immutability of his personality traits reflects indigenous ideas, and whether the emphasis on his emotional turmoil before and after his death is a reference to Christian concerns about the state of the soul at the moment of death. However, Þórólfr's role as a kind of inflictor of social equilibrium as he avenges his son and, consequently, generates a kind of catharsis, complicates the matter. The question remains whether any preparations made before death would have been sufficient to control the capability of becoming posthumously restless.

### The Posthumously Conscious Corpse

The case of Hrappr in *Laxdæla saga* resembles that of Þórólfr, but is an example of a “deviant death” in that Hrappr took special measures to ensure that he could keep an eye on his property posthumously. It can perhaps be said that he was “well prepared” for his death and he apparently had no intention to remain peaceful in his grave. To begin with, Hrappr is depicted as a bad-tempered and violent man, with whom it was hard to get along. He was also greedy – another characteristic of many saga revenants.<sup>78</sup> He was said to

77 Such change first occurs in later sources. See Elise Kleivane, “Sagaene om Oddr ok Eiríkr: Ei teksthistorisk tilnærming til to fornaldersagaer,” in *Fornaldar sagaerne: Myter og virkelighed – Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, eds. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (Copenhagen, 2009), pp. 27–47, here pp. 32–37.

78 Jakobsson, “The Specter of Old Age”; Kanerva, “Having no Power to Return?,” pp. 72–73.



originate from the Hebrides,<sup>79</sup> which in the saga context indicated that he was expected to possess magic skills.<sup>80</sup> As Hrappr got old his temper did not change although his strength waned. While lying in his deathbed, well aware that he would soon depart this life, Hrappr gave instructions to his wife: "When I'm dead I want to be buried in the kitchen doorway. Have me placed in the ground upright, so I'll be able to keep a watchful eye over my home."<sup>81</sup>

Similar to Unnr discussed above, Hrappr did not settle his accounts with God, as was done during deathbed confessions in medieval and early medieval Sweden (as discussed by Mia Korpiola in her chapter). He made sure that he was able to exert his authority posthumously. Vigdis, the wife, did not dare to oppose her dead husband's will, and after Hrappr had died everything was done according to his wishes. As a result, Hrappr was able to remain in a liminal space where he could still visit this world while remaining in the other world. Hrappr's surveillance over his farm did not make it prosper, however, but instead ruined it:

But if it had been difficult to deal with him when he was alive, he was much the worse dead, for he haunted the area relentlessly. It is said that in his haunting he killed most of his servants. To most of the people in the vicinity he caused no end of difficulty and the farm at Hrappsstadir became deserted.<sup>82</sup>

The presence of the dead in medieval culture, and the continuing bonds and relationship with the dead, for instance through commemoration and prayers, has been widely discussed by other scholars.<sup>83</sup> In other cultural and historical contexts the communication with the dead can also be reciprocal in that the

79 *Laxdæla saga*, pp. 19 and 39.

80 See, e.g. William Sayers, "Gunnar, his Irish Wolfhound Sámr, and the Passing of the Old Heroic Order in Njáls saga," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 112 (1997), pp. 43–66, here pp. 43–46.

81 "En þá at ek em andaðr, þá vil ek mér láta gröf grafa í eldhúsdurum, ok skal mik niðr setja standanda þar í durunum; má ek þá enn vendiligar sjá yfir hýbýli mín." *Laxdæla saga*, p. 39. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 19.

82 "Eptir þetta deyr Hrappr. Svá var með öllu farit, sem hann hafði fyrir sagt, því at hon treystisk eigi öðru. En svá illr sem hann var viðreignar, þá er hann lifði, þá jók nú miklu við, er hann var dauðr, því at hann gekk mjök aptr. Svá segja menn, at hann deyddi flest hjón sín í aptrgöngunni; hann gerði mikinn ómaka þeim flestum, er í nánd bjuggu; var eyddr bærinn á Hrappsstöðum," *Laxdæla saga*, p. 39. Trans. Kunz in Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas*, V, p. 19.

83 Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 80–87; Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Die Gegenwart der Toten," in *Death in the Middle Ages*, eds. Hermann Braet and Werner Verbeke, (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia: Series 1) 9 (Leuven, 1983), pp. 19–77.

deceased is considered an active and conscious agent.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, I suggest that in the medieval Icelandic context the dead were ascribed mental processes. As shown above, Þórólfr Lam-foot expressed emotions posthumously as anger increased within his corpse after his son had been killed. The case of Hrappr suggests even more strongly that his mind and senses were expected to be conscious of his physical surroundings, as such awareness was a prerequisite for him to be able to “keep an eye on his dwelling.” Hrappr (and Þórólfr) could express postmortem activity because they were motivated to do so: they had things to attend to, issues that had not been dealt with and violations that had not been settled properly while they were alive. In addition, the departed were thought to take an interest in the dealings of the living and be aware of them – also posthumously. The dead Hrappr’s behaviour suggests that even in death he could be greedy, and wished to keep an eye on his property and prevent other from enjoying it.<sup>85</sup>

These notions have interesting implications concerning the medieval Icelandic “theory of mind.”<sup>86</sup> Consequently, preparations for death and a peaceful afterlife may not have involved only things attended to before death, but required continuous preservation of reciprocal relationships and living according to the norms of the society. Therefore, similar to the strategy of commemorative actions in early medieval Poland as discussed by Dominika Burdzy, the living needed to remember the dead, but not because the well-being of their eternal souls had to be looked after, but because the deceased

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84 For comparison concerning reciprocal communication with the dead in other cultural contexts (here Finno-Baltic) through, e.g. laments, and ensuring that the deceased will be able to communicate with the survivors by building a window in the coffin, see Eila Stepanova, “Reflections of Belief Systems in Karelian and Lithuanian Laments: Shared Systems of Traditional Referentiality?,” *Archaeologia Baltica* 15 (2011), pp. 128–43, here pp. 136–37. For the possibility that there existed a tradition of female mourning songs similar to (Finno-Baltic) laments in Scandinavia, see also Else Mundal, “Female Mourning Songs and Other Lost Oral Poetry in Pre-Christian Nordic culture,” in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, eds. Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, and Alexandra Bergholm, (Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces) 3 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 367–88. Whether or not the Scandinavian laments involved reciprocal communication is not certain.

85 See also Ármann Jakobsson, “The Specter of Old Age.”

86 Here I follow the definition according to which “theory of mind” indicates that people recognise that other people have minds as well. To be precise, that they may desire, pretend, and hold beliefs. For the definition, see A.M. Leslie, “Theory of mind,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* [e-book], eds. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 15652–56.

were thought to be constantly aware of the deeds of the living and exerting their authority over them. In medieval Iceland, the dead were still expected to have the desire to do and possess things, to sense,<sup>87</sup> and to react to the deeds of the living.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the dead were apparently thought to have beliefs. This is suggested by the manner in which Þórólfr's corpse, which was expected to become restless, was attended to in *Eyrbyggja saga*.<sup>89</sup> In a ritual-like manner, his son did not allow the corpse to be carried out through the door, but through a (presumably temporary) hole made in the wall,<sup>90</sup> as if the dead person was anticipated to return to the house by the route that had been used to take it out. Since no ordinary door was used, it was presumably expected that the deceased would fail to find its way back in.<sup>91</sup> If the posthumously restless dead returned they could not succeed in entering the house since the door was elsewhere; the return may have been anticipated to be impossible by removing the temporary opening in the wall. Consequently, the dead were expected to have beliefs of their own that did not necessarily correlate with reality.<sup>92</sup>

In other words, medieval Icelanders thought the dead still had a mind; they did not expect the minds to cease to exist after someone's body had become lifeless, at least not the minds of those strong-willed people who resided in the liminal space after dying in anger or making preparations to ensure the posthumous surveillance of their former property, which would require them to return occasionally. Instead the mind of the dead such as Hrappr could continue to be conscious and aware of things that happened in the community around

87 See also, e.g. the infamous ghost Glámr in the early fourteenth-century *Grettis saga*, of whom it is explicitly said that he "saw" (*sá*). *Grettis saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, (Íslensk Fornrit) 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), pp. 1–290, here p. 120.

88 For similar conceptions, see also Marit Brendbekken, "Beyond Vodou and Anthroposophy in the Dominican-Haitian Borderlands," in *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery*, ed. Bruce Kapferer (New York, 2003), pp. 31–74.

89 A similar ritual occurs also in *Egils saga*, pp. 174–75. See also Kanerva, "Rituals for the Restless Dead."

90 *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 92.

91 Leszek Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials," in *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Leszek Slupecki and Rudolf Simek, (Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia) 23 (Vienna, 2013), pp. 99–136.

92 However, it seems rather as if the person's memory was erased at death and the revenant, as a new form of being, only remembered what occurred *after* death, although it did also remember its former house and kinfolk. I thank Philip Line for this insight.

them (although presumably to a limited extent as they could not notice the removal of the temporary opening!).<sup>93</sup>

The notion of posthumous existence of the mind is relevant to the preparations for death intended to produce passive cadavers. Preparations made before death were not always adequate, and the living also needed to ward off events that could upset the conscious corpse. Like Hrappr's wife, who did not dare to neglect the wishes of her husband, or the killers of Þórólfr's son Arnkell, the living needed to take (or should have taken) into consideration what the dead would "think" of their deeds. Being posthumously conscious also gave the dead a role as upholders of social order, a role ascribed to the deceased in many (already Christianised) cultures as well as medieval Iceland's.<sup>94</sup> Such conceptions were perhaps "pagan" in origin, but in medieval thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Icelandic reality, they were part of the lived religion of people, which did not always correspond to official Christian doctrines. As a consequence, the dead could come back to help their descendants, or return to communities where moral norms had been broken in order to point out

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93 This posthumous consciousness ascribed to the dead is in accordance with the fairly universal tendency of people to attribute to supernatural beings and magical phenomena properties that are in accordance with their "expectations of what minds and persons are like." Robert Shanafelt, "Magic, Miracle, and Marvels in Anthropology," *Ethnos* 69:3 (2004), pp. 317–40.

94 On this role in Iceland in particular, see Kanerva, "The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland"; Kirsi Kanerva, "Messages from the Otherworld: The Roles of the Dead in Medieval Iceland," in *Deconstructing Death: Changing Cultures of Death, Dying, Bereavement and Care in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen, (University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and Social Sciences) 457 (Odense, 2013), pp. 111–30. In other cultures, see, e.g. Koski, *Kuoleman voimat*, pp. 227–29. On ghosts in general as social agents that may comment on "public issues," see also Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, 2004), p. 8. For comparison, see also Ülo Valk, "Ghostly Possession and Real Estate: The Dead in Contemporary Estonian Folklore," *Journal of Folklore Research* 43 (2006) 1, pp. 31–51. Especially the malevolent dead also appear to have had a special role in saga narratives, since encounters with the dead were kinds of rites of passage for individuals whose social status was indeterminate or liminal. These individuals had a chance to enhance their social status if they banished the malevolent dead. Kanerva, "Messages from the Otherworld"; Kanerva, "Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland." Indeterminate social status in this case refers to a status that included actually or symbolically fatherless sons, including bastard sons (the idea of illegitimate birth as a problem suggesting Christian influence), sons whose relationship with their father or occasionally also with their strong-minded mother was a bad one, or widows – thus people, who may have lacked social support.

these faults. Hence preparations made *before* death would not always suffice to ensure that the cadaver remained peaceful.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three cases of strong-willed people in medieval Icelandic sagas to whom contemporary Icelanders could have ascribed the potency of posthumous restlessness, but whose afterlives differed, to broaden the picture of the saga revenants in general. I have examined the circumstances that precede to the death of such potential revenants and preparations made to enhance or control their potential for post-mortem activity.

According to the saga sources, some strong-willed people prepared for their deaths with the wellbeing of their descendants in mind. They, like Unnr discussed above, aimed to preserve peace and social equilibrium in the society that they were about to depart. Unnr, for example, was not worried about the salvation of her soul in a strictly Christian sense, but dealt with worldly matters such as inheritance. Her instructions were followed and respected, which presumably was one reason why she did not make any posthumous appearance in medieval sources.<sup>95</sup>

In effect, as both Þórólfr's and Hrappr's cases suggest, the dead were thought to be still conscious of what went on in the vicinity of their mounds and graves, and they were capable of having mental functions. The dead could still participate in the world of the living and because of this, actions and norm transgressions that could disturb the final repose of the deceased needed to be avoided. It was essential not only to make proper preparations before death, but also to be careful of the actions undertaken after the actual time of death. In other words, the reciprocal relationship with the dead had to be properly taken care of.

Certain mental states experienced at the time of death obviously affected the afterlife of some corpses as well. If a strong-willed person died a sudden death as a consequence of experiencing extreme anger, proper preparations could not be made, and the emotional state could also contribute to the preservation of some reanimating vitality in the corpse. The attributes of anger – blackening, swelling, and heaviness – could continue to exist in the corpse and make its later reanimation possible. However, considering the role of the dead as upholders of social norms, in the light of Þórólfr's case, dying unprepared

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95 Her saint-like activity in post-reformation sources suggests that deeds of the living did make her return occasionally, however. Saints, of course, made regular interventions among the living as mentioned above.

was not necessarily a negative thing, in that lack of actual preparations could contribute to restoration of equilibrium in the community, since the dead could bring attention to problems that had caused social disorder.

Naturally, it can be questioned whether medieval Icelandic sagas reflect the beliefs of thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Icelanders. However, as literature the sagas could also influence people's conceptions and made them aware of the possibility that especially strong-willed persons continued their life after death as revenants which sensed and had feelings, thoughts and beliefs. The idea of life as a preparation for death as such, as discussed in the chapters of Otfried Czaika and Anu Lahtinen was known already in medieval Icelandic culture, as certain characters – and, therefore, people who behaved in certain ways during their lives – were associated with the potential of posthumous restlessness. The idea of the salvation of the soul and the importance of confession and other Christian rituals were emphasised in medieval and early modern Europe in general – as discussed, in particular, by Mia Korpiola, Dominika Burdzy, and Riikka Miettinen in their chapters respectively. However, salvational issues were apparently not the main concern of the saga-writers, who may have been clerics or laypeople. They may have been more interested in worldly concerns and the wellbeing of the living. The sources and the phenomenon examined here do not yet suggest drastic changes in the religious attitudes of people: the idea of strong-willed people as potential revenants represented apparently indigenous beliefs. However, emotions such as anger and greed as forces that motivated the return in the two examples discussed above suggest that the state of mind at the moment of death was likewise considered important. Whether this idea reflects Christian influence is hard to estimate, however, although both anger and greed were among the cardinal sins. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that stories of Hrappr and Þórólfr also referred to problems that could arise if the sins were not confessed before death and the salvation of the soul was not properly taken care of.

Much remains to be studied. In this chapter, only cases of strong-willed people have been examined. Was it only these people who were anticipated to remain conscious of their surroundings and capable of exerting their influence on the living after death, or did all deceased have one or both of these attributes? If the latter was the case, what was the relationship of this belief with the possible belief in ancestor spirits that dwelled in nature, or in the dead as an impersonal power present in the environment? Another question is also, whether – and to what extent – the conceptions of the restless dead represented in *Íslendingasögur* were influenced by Christian ideas of bodily resurrection. These are wider questions which will, I hope, be addressed in the near future.

## William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (1366–1404) and His Preparations for Death

*Cindy Wood*

### Introduction

This paper will explore the long-term preparations for death by William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester from 1366 to his death in 1404, in the context of how his pious works and intercession could benefit his soul after death. During this time, he used the vast wealth of his bishopric and his personal influence to found the dual education institutions of Winchester College and New College, Oxford. While these had an obvious educational function, they were also specifically chantry foundations, as made clear in his foundation statutes.

This paper will examine these foundations in their intercessory context, along with his other preparations for death in the context of his preparations for the fate of his soul in purgatory. Wykeham was a busy and influential figure in the second half of the fourteenth century, and his temporal and spiritual work will be examined to see how the fusion of these elements were used in this way. Therefore, the dual education institutions will be considered alongside his building programmes, especially in the cathedral at Winchester, and bequests in his will in their spiritual and intercessory context. During his episcopate, Wykeham was responsible for the completion of the rebuilding of the nave of this cathedral, with the monks of St. Swithun's Priory offering him three, daily perpetual masses for his soul in gratitude. Likewise his will contained other bequests, in line with the conventional piety of the period, with an intercessory benefit.

These intercessory provisions will be examined to see how Wykeham's exceptional wealth in this period was used for the benefit of his soul after death, how they benefitted others in society, and whether this wealth meant these provisions demonstrate Wykeham to be conventionally pious, or whether his preparations differentiated him from the average citizen of the period.

In the period between 1215 and 1547 intercession played an important part in the lives of the population of England, along with all those of Northern

Europe. There was a close link between the living and the dead, a mutual reliance where the living prayed for the dead with an expectation of the same from future generations. Purgatory was widely understood and expected, thus there was an imperative during life to respect the wishes of the dead and to plan for their own demise as far as financial resources allowed. The anguish of the newly dead who had neglected this duty during their lives was clearly stated in books of the period.<sup>1</sup> Intercession enabled almost all of the population, to some degree, to engage in actions that benefitted their souls and those of their families. These varied from the endowment of masses, known as chantries, to actions described in the Acts of Mercy (Table 3.1). These Acts reflect a variety of tasks that enabled a benefit to be accrued for the soul at the Day of Final Judgement, to assist those in need during life and ensure their prayers for the benefactor's soul during life and after death.

Thus Wykeham's bequests, in common with others of the period from across Europe, ensured numerous prayers and masses for the benefit of his soul, and were believed to intercede for his soul in purgatory, relieving some of this expected suffering. It was believed that to be friendless in purgatory was torment and the bishop arranged that this would never happen. His foundations, especially his educational foundations, along with other provisions make studying Wykeham so important in the context of cult of the dead and in his preparations for death in this post-Black Death period and is the focus of this paper.

### William Wykeham

Wykeham was born in the village of Wickham, Hampshire, but the exact date of his birth and even name are not known. It is likely he was born the son of a yeoman, or free peasant, in the manor of Sir John Scures, in c. 1324.<sup>2</sup> He was of a modest background so his rise to one of the most prestigious Sees in England was unusual for the period. He achieved this through education and personal skills, initially in the grammar school in Winchester, although he did not attend university unlike many of his peers in the episcopate of the fourteenth century. He never returned to the village of his birth to work the land held by his father, but instead entered public service in Hampshire and Winchester

1 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (London, 1992), p. 350. See also the chapter by Dominika Burdzy in this volume.

2 Virginia Davis, *William Wykeham* (London, 2007), p. 4.



until his mid-twenties, when he entered the service of his predecessor as bishop of Winchester, William Edington (ep. 1346–66) in the 1340s.<sup>3</sup>

By 1356, he had attracted the attention of King Edward III (r. 1327–77) and entered the king's service, as clerk of works for the royal residences of Henley, Surrey, and Easthampstead, Berkshire. Within three years he was made responsible for the royal castles of Windsor, Leeds, Dover, and Hadleigh, along with various royal manors. It was here that his skill in organising building works was noted.<sup>4</sup>

Wykeham's career moved forward significantly from 1361 when he committed to the church, taking church orders for the first time and very quickly amassing a considerable income. Wykeham was a pluralist from early in his career, and within a short period had amassed two benefices and eleven prebends, together worth £873 6s. 8d. a year and all with the Pope's permission. At the same time his royal career enabled him to be close to the king, Edward III, as royal secretary, in 1367. This dual role of cleric and royal official was not new or uncommon in this period. 1366 saw him elevated by royal patronage to the vacant See of Winchester, and he was confirmed in this post by papal decree in 1368, after initial opposition. In the same year he was promoted to Royal Chancellor, one of the major administrative posts in the kingdom, but this was not to last. 1369 saw renewed hostilities with France, as part of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), and dissatisfaction with events led to him being replaced by a lay Chancellor in 1371. This unpopular war with France occurred in the declining years of Edward's reign, and while Wykeham resigned as Chancellor, he remained an important figure in English politics.

The troubled reign of Edward III's grandson King Richard II (r. 1377–99) saw Wykeham use his political skills to their greatest extent. This reign of a minor, Richard being only nine years old when he ascended to the throne, led to a rise in different factions within the court and country. Wykeham sat on royal councils from 1378 to 1385, and again at the height of Richard's problems with his nobles (known as the Lords Appellant) between 1387–88. In this dispute, although Wykeham was supportive of and sympathetic to the Lord Appellants' issues, he remained close to the king, serving as Chancellor of England 1389–91. The difficulties of Richard II's reign and the role of Wykeham and other statesmen and nobles within it are covered in more detail in other works, such as Nigel Saul's biography of Richard II for the Yale Monarchs Series,<sup>5</sup> and Virginia

3 Davis, *Wykeham*, p. 14.

4 Anna Eavis, "The Commemorative Foundations of the William of Wykeham," in *The Medieval Chantry in England*, eds. Julian M. Luxford and John McNeill (Leeds, 2011), pp. 169–95, here p. 169.

5 Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (London, 1999).

Davis' biography of the bishop.<sup>6</sup> Suffice to say that Wykeham survived the troubles to become an elder statesman in the reign of Henry IV (r. 1399–1413), usurper of Richard II in 1399, and died on 27 September 1404, in the bishop's residence of South Waltham, Hampshire.<sup>7</sup>

### Conventional Piety and Preparations for Death

Wykeham, in common with many other people in this period both clerical and lay, had regard in life to the fate of his soul after death. The doctrine of purgatory as the place where souls suffered purgation (trials of fire) for their sins in the period between death and the Day of Final Judgement had become official doctrine in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, and appeared in many handbooks created from this date.<sup>8</sup> While the ideas about purgatory were not new in 1215, this adoption, along with the effects of the Black Death (in England 1348–49) had a major impact on how the relationship between the living and dead was perceived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There were many ways in which to mitigate the expected horrors of purgatory, of which ensuring prayers for the dead were a major feature.<sup>9</sup> Intercession for the souls of the dead can be seen in many different types of evidence from this later medieval period and these shall be examined in the context of the actions of William Wykeham, to help reveal whether his preparations for death were unusual or unique for this era.

In the period leading up to the religious Reformations across Europe in the sixteenth century (discussed in later chapters of this book), it was believed that the dead suffering in purgatory were made aware of the suffrages or prayers undertaken on their behalf by the living.<sup>10</sup> These prayers were believed to relieve the suffering of the dead.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it was a dread of the period that one might be cast into purgatory friendless, without this support from the prayers of the living. Therefore, there was an impetus for the living to pray for these

6 Davis, *Wykeham*.

7 Davis, *Wykeham*, p. 167.

8 Paul Binski, *Medieval Death* (London, 1996), p. 186. See also the chapter by Bertil Nilsson in this volume.

9 Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, "Introduction: placing the dead in late medieval and early modern Europe," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 3–4.

10 Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 350.

11 Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 365.

souls while alive in the hope that successive generations would do the same for them in the future.<sup>12</sup> In an effort not to be cast into purgatory without these prayers, many people set up prayers for their soul either during their lifetimes or at the point of death, in their wills. Wills often included gifts to different religious institutions who were expected to reciprocate with prayers for their benefactors.

Intercession, therefore, could be gained for the soul via prayers from different sources. It was hoped that families and descendants would include the dead in their prayers as a familial responsibility, but prayers were also expected from the groups of people granted gifts or aid by the dead, especially gifts bequeathed in wills. The prayers of the grateful poor were considered especially valuable to the souls of their benefactors.<sup>13</sup> But while endowed masses and prayers were especially beneficial to the soul after death as they increased divine service, they were not the only way of achieving intercession, and other actions were seen as pleasing to God, and will be considered below.

Consideration of intercession does need to include the actions undertaken by benefactors in relation to the Acts of Temporal and Spiritual Mercy. Many gifts found in wills relate closely to these categories, and can reveal how the relationship between donor and recipient benefitted both parties. This is especially seen in the foundation of hospitals, where the care given to the poor and needy was seen as providing such care to Christ himself.<sup>14</sup> (See Table 3.1 below.)

TABLE 3.1 *Acts of Spiritual and Temporal Mercy*

| Acts of Spiritual Mercy | Acts of Temporal Mercy    |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Teach the ignorant      | Feed the hungry           |
| Counsel the needy       | Give drink to the thirsty |
| Admonish sinners        | Clothe the naked          |
| Comfort the sorrowful   | Welcome the stranger      |
| Pardon offenders        | Visit the sick            |
| Suffer tribulation      | Visit the prisoner        |
| Pray for all men        | Bury the dead             |

12 Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 352.

13 Clive Burgess, "Death and Commemoration in an English Parish," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 49–50.

14 Barbara S. Bowers, *The Medieval Hospital and Medical Practice* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 86.

Gifts in line with these Acts of Mercy did not always require large sums of money and allowed intercession for the soul to be available at many different levels of society. Wykeham, unlike some of the other bishops at the end of the fourteenth century, for example, John Buckingham, bishop of Lincoln (d. 1399) and Thomas Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter (d. 1394), did include some of these categories of society within his will. For example, he left £200 for the benefit of prisoners in Newgate, London; Marshalsea, and those in Winchester, Guildford, Oxford, Berkshire, and Old and New Sarum.<sup>15</sup> This was in comparison with a William Brograve, a draper of London, whose will, dated 6 September 1504, left 20s. (£1) to each of the prisons of London, in Ludgate, Newgate, King's Bench, and Marshalsea.<sup>16</sup> This is a reflection of relative wealth as well as personal choice.

A common feature of funerals in this period was the provision of food, drink and clothing for paupers attending a funeral. This provision can be found in the wills of both bishops and ordinary people, although often at different levels. William Rotheley of Dartford, Kent, requested thirteen paupers at his funeral, all of which were to be clothed, and all other paupers attending to be given 1 d. (a penny). For Thomas Brantingham, as Bishop of Exeter, this number was 33 paupers, while Wykeham requested that all his poor tenants be given 4 d. (four pence), as well as other paupers who attended his funeral to be given the same amount. All of these gifts came with the obligation for these paupers to pray for their benefactors' soul.<sup>17</sup>

The injunction in the Acts of Mercy to educate the ignorant was one area that Wykeham took very seriously, as can be seen in his foundation of the joint establishments of Winchester College and New College Oxford, these will be discussed below. Wykeham's efforts to ensure prayers of his soul after death in his will, written close to the point of death in 1403 as was the custom, do not reveal the efforts made by the bishop to secure intercession for his soul over a much longer period. For this, we need to consider the two areas that exercised him over the preceding three decades, in his chantry and educational establishments.

### Chantry Foundations

Chuntries were the most popular religious foundation in the period after the Black Death across Roman Catholic Europe, and while many thousands are

15 Robert Lowth, *The Life of William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester* (London, 1758), p. 386.

16 Will of William Brograve, *Medieval and Tudor Kent P.C.C. Wills*, 8, trans. L.L. Duncan, p. 207, available online at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

17 Burgess, "Death and Commemoration," p. 49.

known, their true number cannot be quantified. Chantry masses not only benefitted those named in their prayers, such as family, descendants, ancestors, and often the royal family,<sup>18</sup> but also all Christian souls. Chantries were seen as valuable to the whole community as an increase in divine service, and could be permanent, funded through gifts of land to the Church or temporary, limited by an amount of money or time. Founders could and did opt for both types, and if a permanent chantry was established it was not necessary for the founder to be buried near the altar performing the chantry masses. Some founders, like Wykeham, set up more than one chantry, often in churches that held a personal connection, for example, his chantry endowment at Southwick Priory, where his parents were also buried.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence for chantry foundations come from many different sources dependent on their type. Very few temporary ones are documented beyond requests in wills. The permanent, perpetual foundations can be seen in different sets of documents and in some cases in physical remains. There are some surviving foundation deeds and other evidence can be found that stem from the Statute of Mortmain enacted by Edward I (r. 1272–1307) in 1279.<sup>20</sup> This Statute aimed to restrict the flow of land into the “dead hand” of the church, by making such transactions, almost always for the benefit of the donors’ souls, impossible without royal authorisation. These licences to alienate land in Mortmain to the church for the benefit of particular souls can now be found in the Patent Rolls. In order to set up a permanent foundation these licences were granted by the Crown, in return for a fee, and the Patent Rolls recorded the transfer of land or tenements to the Church to support the religious foundation. These assets were necessary to provide an income for the priest, along with the incidentals of the chantry, such as vestments for the priests, books, candles, bread, and wine.<sup>21</sup>

However, many more chantries were founded than appear in the Patent Rolls,<sup>22</sup> as licences were expensive and over time the importance of this Statute varied. Many foundations bypassed this system altogether through the use of feoffees, a group of chosen colleagues who oversaw the setting up and running of a foundation and held the land in trust. The use of feoffees has meant that many of their records are not easy to find.

18 Joel T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: The Social Function of Aristocratic Benevolence, 1307–1485: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307–1485* (London, 1972), pp. 21–23.

19 Davis, *Wykeham*, pp. 107–08.

20 Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1997), p. 251.

21 K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 51.

22 Alan Kreider, *English Chantries: Road to Dissolution* (London, 1979), pp. 72–73.

There are many permanent chantry foundations found in all types of churches across England and Wales, including a considerable number of chantry chapels that have survived in physical form: Wykeham's chantry in Winchester Cathedral is one of these. While some chapels may have survived in physical terms, very little documentary evidence has remained to enable the foundation process to be identified, and therefore compared. Kathleen Wood-Legh, in her pioneering work on chantries in Britain, described this process, which started with the agreement of the motherhouse, an area that is often opaque.<sup>23</sup> The agreement with the motherhouse also covered many other areas, including the provision of sufficient funds for the priest or priests along with the incidentals of the chapel (wine, candles, vestments, books, etc.) and also where the altar or chapel were to be located. If a chantry was founded at an altar which had existing foundations on a "time-share" basis, then an agreement for the sequence of chantry masses might need to be established. This process also often included the very detailed arrangements for governance of the chantry, including its seal if it was an independent body; annual accounts; details of how vacancies were to be dealt with and how to ensure that the founder would be remembered.

For example, the foundation documents of the chantry of Anne of York, Duchess of Exeter (1439–76) in St George's Chapel, Windsor in 1481, stated very clearly that during the intercessionary mass the priest was required to turn to the congregation and say in English, that the remembrances were for Anne, late Duchess of Exeter and her husband Thomas St. Leger (c. 1440–83).<sup>24</sup> Anne was the sister of Edward IV (r. 1461–83) and Richard III (r. 1483–85) of England. Not all instructions are so clear, but the use of heraldry in the copes, vestments, and screens would also ensure the founder would not be forgotten.

The setting up of a perpetual chantry is rarely found in wills, as these foundations required the transfer of property or significant amounts of cash to provide a perpetual income for the chantry. This is the case with the chantry foundations of William Wykeham, while his will is very comprehensive in regard to prayers and gifts to friends, it does not include the chantries founded earlier.

### The Chantries of William Wykeham

Wykeham was in the enviable position of having a large income that he could use to set up foundations for the good of his soul after death. Wykeham's first

<sup>23</sup> Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries*, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Windsor [United Kingdom], St. George's Archive XV.58.C.7.

foundation after his installation in 1368 occurred quickly in 1369 and was fairly standard for the period. Given his access to considerable financial resources, he set up a chantry of five canons in the Augustinian House of Southwick Priory (Hampshire) in his new diocese, with the transfer of two manors of Boarhunt Herberd and Herbelyn in Hampshire.<sup>25</sup> This chantry was set up with strict instructions regarding the role of the chantry priests, the liturgy to be used, and their timing.<sup>26</sup> Southwick was the burial place of his parents, John and Sybil, and they were the beneficiaries of these soul masses, along with Wykeham himself and Edward III, his royal benefactor. The five canons were specifically his chantry priests and were to be appointed with the approval of Wykeham in his lifetime and after his death by the successive bishops of Winchester.

This arrangement was not in line with how many other chantries were founded where a gift of property was transferred to the mother church to support the chantry priest, who would be appointed by the parish church or religious house in which the chantry was located. In these cases this property was not generally kept separate from other assets of the religious house, and the income used for the maintenance of all staff, each of which might have different responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> But Southwick Priory was required to keep all the grants of land for these chantry canons separate and the income was only to be used for these chantry activities.<sup>28</sup>

The statutes governing these chantry priests as Augustinian canons were precise and detailed. The increase in numbers over the original thirteen (the number representing Jesus and the Disciples) at its foundation in c. 1133, reflected Wykeham's intention to increase the numbers and income of the house after the Black Death. This aspect can also be seen in his later foundations of Winchester College and New College Oxford, which aimed to improve the education and numbers of clergy following the Black Death and the subsequent plague visitations in 1361 and 1369.

As the chantry in Southwick Priory was established in 1369–70 it is certain that Wykeham took a proprietorial role. There were visitations to the Priory, for example, on 6 May 1397,<sup>29</sup> and any subsequent chantry canons had to be

25 Hampshire Record Office [Winchester, United Kingdom], HRO 4M53/6, Letters Patent, Southwick Priory.

26 Hampshire Record Office, HRO 4M53/A5, Statutes of the Chantries of William Wykeham in Southwick Priory.

27 Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries*, p. 8.

28 Eaves, "Commemorative Foundations," p. 171.

29 T.F. Kirby, ed., *Wykeham's Register 2*, (*Hampshire Record Series*) 12:2 (London and Winchester, 1899), p. 470.

presented to the bishop or his deputy on appointment. For example, Thomas Gervays and Thomas Warener who took their oath for these posts on 22 August 1383, at the bishop's palace of Southwark.<sup>30</sup>

The decades between the founding of the Southwick Priory chantry and those in Winchester Cathedral and St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, saw Wykeham change focus for his intercessionary foundations towards his dual educational foundations of Winchester College and New College Oxford. These also had an intercessionary function, which will be discussed fully below.

Wykeham's chantry in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, was founded 29 May 1402 long after his work on the rebuilding of the castle in the 1350s. This building work was paid for by the ransom of King John II of France (r. 1350–64), captured at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.<sup>31</sup> The bishops of Winchester acted as prelates to the chivalric Order of the Garter based in this Chapel, and this connection along with the building work undertaken in the castle earlier in his career explains the location of this foundation.<sup>32</sup> Wykeham granted £200 for the foundation of this chantry of one priest, expecting an annual return of £13 6s. 8d. for its maintenance.<sup>33</sup> The bishop wished his earlier patron, Edward III and his parents to be included in the prayers offered in this chantry. There is no evidence this chantry was ever enclosed in a physical chapel, and the St George's Chapel of this period was superseded in the late fifteenth century by the current building initiated by Edward IV after 1471. Unlike his other chantries this foundation does not seem to have survived in the records of the Chapel, and it is entirely possible that these masses were celebrated without recording any payments to the celebrants. While St George's Chapel was specifically exempted from the Second Chantry Act, Wykeham's foundation is not noted in the documents generated at this time.<sup>34</sup> As Prelate of the Order of the Garter, Wykeham was also included in the suffrages offered for this post, garnering some benefit to his soul in addition to the chantry masses.

30 Kirby, ed., Wykeham's Register 2, p. 349.

31 Steven Brindle and Stephen Priestley, "Edward III's Building Campaigns at Windsor and the Employment of Masons, 1346–1377," in *St George's Chapel in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Nigel Saul (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 203–24, here pp. 210–11.

32 Hugh E.L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter 1348–1461: Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 196.

33 Roger Bowers, "The Lady Chapel and its Musicians, c. 1210–1559," in *Winchester Cathedral Nine Hundred Years, 1093–1993*, ed. John Crook (Chichester, 1993), pp. 247–56; Lowth, *Wykeham*, p. 276.

34 J.R. Tanner, ed., *Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485–1603 with an historical commentary* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 106.



The personal chantry founded in Winchester Cathedral is still situated between pillars in the south aisle of the nave, in the fifth bay from the west end, and is a large and impressive monument. This chantry was part of an impressive rebuilding of the nave of the cathedral at Winchester, a programme started by Wykeham's predecessor William Edington. It is also significant that this building work commenced in 1394, after his two educational colleges had been founded.<sup>35</sup> Edington had started to rebuild the west end of the cathedral during his episcopate and suffered from labour problems in the aftermath of the Black Death (1348–49). At his death, the west end had been constructed and windows built to the north and south of this edifice, and Wykeham left money in his will for this work to continue.<sup>36</sup> This was also the case in 1404 when he died, as funds were left in his will to complete this work.<sup>37</sup>

Wykeham, with his master mason William Wynford, who also worked with the bishop at St. George's Chapel, Windsor,<sup>38</sup> were responsible for the appearance of the nave as it is seen today, moving into the Perpendicular architectural style. The bishop's chantry chapel was integral to this and was built at the point where Wykeham was supposed to have heard mass performed by a Richard Perkis in his childhood. But it is perhaps more significant that the chapel is located in the middle of his building works. The chantry chapel has a vaulted roof that reaches the level of the south aisle vaulting, contains a large reredos with modern replacement statues, and the bishop's tomb. It was completed by Wykeham's death and he asked for burial within it.

The establishment of this chantry, when compared with the process of chantry foundation as outlined by Kathleen Wood-Legh, immediately indicates a variation. On 16 August 1404, only six weeks before his death on 27 September, Wykeham drew up an agreement with the prior and convent of the cathedral priory (St. Swithun's Priory) regarding the chantry masses in his chapel. This agreement is a rare survival, and was written after his will had been drawn up on 24 July of the preceding year, in which he dealt with bequests to different religious orders and family members.<sup>39</sup> While the lateness of this foundation might suggest no long-term strategy for his soul after death, it appears this chantry was an integral part of the rebuilding work in the cathedral which had been in progress for a decade.

35 John Hare, "The Architectural Patronage of Two Late Medieval Bishops: Edington, Wykeham and the rebuilding of Winchester Cathedral Nave," *The Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012), pp. 273–305, here p. 273.

36 Frederick Busby, *Winchester Cathedral 1079–1979* (Ringwood, 1979), p. 38.

37 Lowth, *Wykeham*, p. 285.

38 Brindle and Priestley, "Edward III's Building Campaigns," p. 220.

39 Lowth, *Wykeham*, pp. 384–96.

The terms of the agreement with the Priory of St. Swithun in the cathedral (one of the uniquely English phenomena of monastic cathedral priories) set out Wykeham's wishes regarding the operation and liturgical requirements of his chantry. These were at variance to those found in Southwick Priory, on behalf of the bishop and his parents. The prior and convent of St. Swithun's Priory agreed to perform three daily masses for the benefit of the bishop's soul. These were to be performed by monks of the priory each day, whereas in Southwick additional canons were to be recruited to perform the soul masses. These Winchester monks were members of the priory, and not secular priests as was the case with the chantry of two chaplains founded by Archbishop Arundel in Canterbury Cathedral (1396–97 and 1399–1414),<sup>40</sup> another monastic cathedral priory. Likewise, in Southwick Wykeham funded this chantry with two manors, whereas the only evidence for funding for the Winchester chantry was relief from a corrody of £10 a year and the rents from a manor in West Meon (Hampshire), worth 45s. 4d. (£2 5 shillings and 4 pence). This manor was actually the property of the Priory of St. Swithun,<sup>41</sup> and it is likely that the bishop rearranged the terms of an earlier rental to the advantage of the Priory.

This was still, however, a very modest sum in contrast to his earlier foundations and there is no evidence of any endowment to fund this chapel unlike his other intercessionary foundations. The reason for this difference can be found in the 1404 agreement where the prior and community of St. Swithun are recorded as expressing gratitude for the bishop's temporal work in the cathedral, that is the rebuilding of the nave, thus this chantry and its three daily soul masses were gifts to Wykeham. This arrangement might not have been uncommon in the period, but the evidence for this is rare and Wykeham's example might be a model of chantry foundation otherwise unknown. Many bishops may have used their own funds for building development and might have expected or been rewarded with suffrages in return, but this is rarely documented.

The 1404 agreement between Wykeham and the cathedral priory also set out the liturgical arrangements of the chantry. Of the three masses, the first was to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the same dedication as his colleges, while the second and third masses were the choice of the celebrants, to take place at the third and sixth hours.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Wykeham also required the

40 Canterbury Cathedral Archive [Canterbury, United Kingdom], CCA-DCC-ChAnt/C/148, Foundation Charter of Archbishop Arundel's Chantry.

41 Joan Greatrex, ed., *The Register of the Common Seal of the Priory of St Swithun, Winchester 1345–1497*, (Hampshire Record Series) 2 (Trowbridge, 1978), p. 22.

42 Lowth, *Wykeham*, p. 382.

poor scholars of the Almonry School in the monastic precinct, to sing every evening in the chantry chapel, in honour of the Virgin Mary, and offer psalms and prayers for the bishop.<sup>43</sup> These were pauper boys, and their prayers were seen as valuable for the soul of the bishop. This agreement does not mention the bishop's obit, but the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, a survey of the financial state of the church in England in 1536, listed alms to the value of £26 8s. 4d. to be distributed to the poor on this occasion, in memory of the bishop, along with his parents, King Edward III and Queen Philippa of Hainault (1314–69), Richard II (d. 1400) and his queen, Anne of Bohemia (1366–94).<sup>44</sup> If this agreement had not survived, the character of this foundation would not be known and the unusual situation where the chantry did not increase divine service would not be known. All of the chantries in Winchester Cathedral disappeared with the dissolution of St. Swithun's Priory by Henry VIII (r. 1509–47) in 1540, in common with virtually all monastic chantries across England, many of which remain unknown. They did not survive a further decade to be included in the records of the Dissolution of the Chantries under Edward VI in 1547/8.

These chantry foundations, in addition to the required prayers for his soul form a considerable number of prayers and masses being performed for the bishop's soul, both during his life and after his death. The fact that he founded these intercessionary institutions in different churches was common in this period for those with the financial resources. They reveal a long-term strategy for the benefit of his soul and those of his parents, as the Southwick Priory chantry was founded within three years his elevation to the See of Winchester.

### Wykeham's Educational Foundations: Winchester College and New College, Oxford

After founding the chantry of five canons at Southwick in 1369, the bishop then undertook what was the most ambitious project of his episcopate, the building of the dual foundation of Winchester College and New College, Oxford. These two institutions were built in the tradition of collegiate foundations of this period as intercessionary establishments that benefitted the soul of their founder. These collegiate establishments were favoured by aristocratic and episcopal founders of the late Middle Ages, rather than the founding of monastic houses.<sup>45</sup> The royal dukes of York founded such an establishment at

43 Bowers, "The Lady Chapel," p. 250.

44 *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Temp. Henricus VIII, *Auctoritate Regia Institutus*, 2 (London, 1810), p. 262.

45 Kreider, *English Chantries*, pp. 6–7.

Fotheringhay in 1411,<sup>46</sup> while John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (ep. 1327–69), founded of college of 40 canons in Ottery St. Mary, Devon, in 1337.<sup>47</sup> Colleges were intercessionary in nature, and generally had a large staff to ensure the full round of liturgy was performed.

The two colleges founded by Wykeham were always designed to be complementary, with St. Mary's College in the city of Winchester, founded for 70 poor scholars from the Winchester diocese, whose scholars were expected to then move on to New College in Oxford. The Winchester scholars were augmented by a Warden, ten Fellows, two schoolmasters, three chaplains, sixteen choristers, and three lay clerks. There was also provision for up to ten additional scholars who had to be related to Wykeham's own family, friends or local gentry. The establishment in Oxford was the formalisation of support for poor scholars, as Wykeham had been providing support for these for some years before the formal foundation of New College.<sup>48</sup>

This dual foundation, which took Wykeham decades to complete, reflects one of the Spiritual Acts of Mercy, to teach the ignorant, as well as more practical concerns. The Black Death took a terrible toll on the clergy of England, especially the parish priests who attended deathbeds to hear final confessions and offer comfort.<sup>49</sup> While the effect of the Black Death in terms of numbers is still being debated and will probably never be known, it is clear that 30–40 per cent of clergy perished in this epidemic. Therefore, the foundation of a school and university college that would enable not only a larger number of scholars to study, but also swell the numbers of clergy in the diocese as replacements, was a practical response to this short fall. The shortage of priests over the next few decades was acute,<sup>50</sup> and the revisitations of the plague in 1361 and 1369 did not help the situation.<sup>51</sup>

The initial shortage of priests immediately after the Black Death led to ordination being offered to men who had not worked their way through minor orders in the normal way. For example, the injunction issued by Pope Clement VI (r. 1342–52) to the Archbishop of York, William Zouche (archep. 1342–52), 12 November 1349, allowed the archbishop to provide his parishes with priests, either from the ranks of minor clergy or those previously who lived a monastic

46 Clive Burgess, "St George's College, Windsor: Context and Consequence," in *St George's Chapel in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Nigel Saul (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 63–97, here p. 85.

47 David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London, 1953), p. 338.

48 Davis, *Wykeham*, p. 12.

49 Colin Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and its aftermath in late-medieval England* (London, 1997), p. 97.

50 Rosemary Horrox, ed. and trans., *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), p. 79.

51 Horrox, ed., *Black Death*, p. 86.

life, in this case an Augustinian canon.<sup>52</sup> While this did solve the initial problem, by 1357 there was concern being expressed about the quality of teaching generally and its effect on the quality of the clergy in all types of churches as well. This was not just an issue in the Winchester diocese, but was being expressed in other areas, for example, by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter.<sup>53</sup> By providing a source of trained and educated priests, Wykeham could mitigate some of these problems, and in this case the dual foundation can be seen as a very forward thinking plan.

To ensure these foundations survived into the future, Wykeham was very active in acquiring land for their endowments in the 1370s and 1380s. He was aware that these were necessary as his successors might not be as keen on these projects. Moreover, his brief periods of banishment from the royal court illustrated how vulnerable they might be to political interference. He was also aware of the fate of institutions that had insufficient endowments during his episcopal visitations.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Wykeham embarked on a course of acquiring licences to alienate land in mortmain for both colleges. For St. Mary's College, Winchester, these endowments included advowsons of churches in Stepelmorden (Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire),<sup>55</sup> Downton (Downton, Wiltshire),<sup>56</sup> along with manors, for example, Hermondesworth (Harmonsworth, Middlesex). He also acquired land surrounding the college in Winchester by licences in frank almain, that is, land held free of the feudal military service. In 1393, he expanded the campus of the college to the River Itchen and up to the boundary of the Priory of St. Swithun in Winchester Cathedral.<sup>57</sup>

The bishop likewise obtained licences for endowments for New College, Oxford. In 1384, he acquired a licence for land up to £300 value per year from the king.<sup>58</sup> He also acquired the advowson of churches to the benefit of the college, for example, in Abberley (Adderley, Oxfordshire), in 1381.<sup>59</sup> The Patent Rolls demonstrate Wykeham's use of this system to guarantee the financial foundation of these two foundations. In addition, he used his closeness to the throne

52 Horrox, ed., *Black Death*, pp. 273–74.

53 Davis, *Wykeham*, p. 145.

54 T.F. Kirby, *Annals of Winchester College: from its foundation in the year 1382 to the present time* (Oxford, 1892), p. 92.

55 The National Archives [United Kingdom], Kew, *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Richard II, 1377–1381*, 1, p. 412.

56 G.J. Morris, ed., *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Richard II 1385–1389* [hereafter *CPR*], 3 (London, 1900), p. 483.

57 Morris, ed., *CPR, Richard II, 1391–1396*, 5 (London, 1905), p. 268.

58 Morris, ed., *CPR, Richard II, 1381–1385*, 2 (London, 1897), p. 444.

59 Morris, ed., *CPR, Richard II, 1377–1381*, 1 (London, 1895), p. 621.

to avoid the customary payments of pontage, pavage, chiminage, murage, and other costs for the building of these colleges, in 1383.<sup>60</sup>

The dates of the licences to alienate land in mortmain for the benefit of these two foundations follow a pattern of the changing fortunes for the king and his nobles. The early licences were from the period when Richard II emerged from his minority in 1381, and was establishing himself as monarch. This was also the period when the bishop acted as a royal councillor. But no licences were obtained by the bishop during the problems which emerged in 1387 when some of Richard's nobles, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester (1355–97), Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel (1346–97), Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (1338–1401), Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham (1367/68–99), and Henry, Earl of Derby (1367–1413, later Henry IV, r. 1399–1413), called collectively the Lords Appellant, rose in armed opposition to the king. The issue of licences began again in the early 1390s, a period before the king turned on the Lords Appellant, in 1397. Richard II's usurpation in 1399 marks the end of any such royal authorisations gained by Wykeham for his foundations before his death in 1404. It appears that these licences were only granted when the bishop was in close contact with the king and at the centre of government. This is also reflected in the king's grant of privileges to the two colleges in 1395, when the king noted that his personal affection for the bishop in allowing the grant.<sup>61</sup>

While these two foundations do reflect one of the Acts of Mercy, that is, teaching the ignorant, Wykeham also expected to be a recipient of the prayers emanating from both the foundations as the staff and scholars prayed for the soul of the bishop daily. But the bishop was not the only recipient of the masses and prayers of these establishments as the priests in St Mary's College, Winchester, also accepted obits and temporary chantries. The muniments of the College contain several of these requests, including their grants of money. For example, later bishops of Winchester gave money to the college in return for obits: Cardinal Henry Beaufort (bishop of Winchester 1404–47) gave £100 used to buy the manor of Buttys, Hampshire, and Bishop William Waynflete (ep. 1447–86) along with Warden Cleve of the College, gave £146 13s. 4d., used to buy the manor of Willhall, Hampshire, for their obits.<sup>62</sup> Other chantries

60 Morris, ed., *CPR, Richard II, 1381–1385*, 2, p. 241; these tolls contributed to the upkeep of bridges – pontage; the paving of streets – pavage; the repair of town walls – murage, and the passage through forests – chiminage.

61 Peter Partner, "Wykeham, William (c. 1324–1404)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30127>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

62 Sheila Himsforth, ed., *Winchester College Muniments, a Descriptive List*, 1 (Winchester, 1976), pp. 4–5.

were also founded here, for example, John Bouke, Warden of New College, Oxford (in office 1403–29), who requested burial in the College's chapel after his death in 1451, with a chantry of one year to be performed by the Fellows of the College.<sup>63</sup>

There is one example of a freestanding chantry chapel still in the middle of the College's quadrangle, the Fromond chantry. This was founded and built for the souls of John Fromond (d. 1420), and his wife, Maud, who are both buried within the chapel. This is a two-storey structure, completed by 1446, with living accommodation for the priest on the upper level. Fromond was a steward of the manors that belonged to the College, and he left money in his will for the creation of the chapel and for its priest.

The Statutes of Winchester College, issued in 1400 by the bishop, make it clear that while he had a high regard for the quality of teaching in his two establishments, it was their intercessionary function that was of ultimate significance. Importantly, the Statutes clearly declare that should the income of the College fail, the Masters and scholars should be lost before any of the chaplains.<sup>64</sup> While the scholars and Master did provide prayers daily for the bishop, they were not able to provide an increase in divine service through masses; therefore, their value to his soul was less than those chaplains as priests. This aspect of the colleges is not often discussed, but can reveal just how these institutions were part of Wykeham's long-term strategy for masses for the benefit of his soul in perpetuity. The Statutes reveal the importance of firstly these masses, and then the education of scholars, should the college be in extreme financial conditions.

The Statutes of New College, Oxford, were also written in 1400, and link the two colleges closely. This document is evidence of his belief in a good education in subjects including medicine, astronomy, civil and canon law, as well as theology, but also includes the necessity of prayers for the founder and the other benefactors in perpetuity.<sup>65</sup> Prayers were expected daily for Wykeham in the chapel. While these two institutions were for the advancement of the Holy Church as they educated many who then entered the priesthood, this was not their only function, they also increased divine service, both through the increase in the number of priests and those performed daily in the colleges.<sup>66</sup>

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63 Himsworth, ed., *Winchester Muniments*, p. 8.

64 Kirby, *Annals*, p. 92.

65 E.A. Bond, ed., *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford with Royal Patents of Foundation Injunctions of Visitors and Catalogues of Documents Relating to the University Preserved in the Public Record Office* (Oxford, 1853), p. 67.

66 Bond, ed., *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, p. 47.

The Statutes were very detailed in both their endowment and the conduct of students, Warden, Fellows, etc. Those in Oxford were expected to take oaths on admittance; to avoid playing of games such as chess; remove any beards when entering the master's degree (a year after completing the bachelor degree) and conform to the wishes of the Founder in discipline.<sup>67</sup> The role of successive bishops of Winchester as overseers of the foundations was also included in these Statutes, and in return, they were recipients of any prayers. The annual obit of Wykeham was rewarded with allowances for all fellows and students who attended.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the bishop was in receipt of a considerable number of suffrages and masses even before his other chantry foundations, in St George's Chapel, Windsor, and Winchester Cathedral are considered.

This aspect of both institutions was put to the test in 1457/8 when the Second Chantry Act was passed by Edward VI (r. 1547–53). This Act dissolved all types of intercessionary foundations, including most collegiate churches such as Ottery St. Mary.<sup>69</sup> Both Winchester College and Eton College were specifically exempted from dissolution in this Act, along with their related university colleges of New College (Oxford) and King's College (Cambridge).<sup>70</sup> Both were considered parts of their relative universities, Oxford and Cambridge, while Eton was part of the dual foundation by Henry VI (r. 1422–61 & 1470–71) with King's College, Cambridge. This saved the schools from closure, and Winchester was even allowed to retain their chapel plate, as long as they did not use it for superstitious acts.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

Intercession for the soul after death in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period had a social function as well as religious significance and was blended into society in ways not seen today. The choices available to the faithful were varied and could reflect personal interest, experience, and status. Wykeham's intercessionary choices need to be seen in these contexts, as intercession was more than just providing masses for the soul, although these were very important.

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67 Bond, ed., *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, p. 51.

68 Bond, ed., *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, p. 75.

69 Kreider, *English Chantries*, p. 162.

70 Tanner, ed., *Tudor Documents*, pp. 162–63.

71 Himsworth, ed., *Winchester Muniments*, p. 12.



His status as a rich senior bishop in England may be seen in the scale of his educational foundations, only achieved in the next century by a king, Henry VI at Eton College and King's College, Cambridge. While Wykeham's dual foundation had a practical, i.e., educational, function, there was also an important intercessionary purpose. These two institutions may also reflect how education had enabled his own career, given his own humble origins and reflect the value of patronage, both received and given. Likewise, his other bequests reflected his social awareness in acts of charity, through gifts to prisoners and those attending his annual obits. The context of these must be the long-term effects of the Black Death, and later plague events, which not only focused the mind on the possibility of a sudden death, but also the plight of those living in poverty.

The intercessionary foundations of William Wykeham clearly highlight his concern to avoid the plight of a soul forgotten in purgatory, for himself, his parents and royal patrons. Chantry were the most common religious foundation in the period between the Black Death and the 1530s, but many of the temporary or time-limited chantries have been little studied. Although his soul also benefitted from the masses performed in Southwick Priory and St. George's Chapel, Windsor, he did set up his own chantry in his cathedral church, a monastic house. The foundation of this chantry is a rare example of monastic masses being diverted for the benefit of a person who was not a monk of the house. The gratitude expressed in the foundation agreement by the priory to the bishop gives an explanation for this gift.

Wykeham used his wealth to help finish the rebuilding of the nave of the cathedral, and, for his part, expected the intercessionary masses to continue in perpetuity. Wykeham was well versed in using the mortmain licences to obtain assets for his other foundations and this chantry is therefore unique in his foundations for not receiving any financial support. It is not possible to gauge whether this type of agreement, where masses were granted in return for temporal investment in a motherhouse, occurred in other churches and cathedrals, but it might represent a genre of chantries or intercessionary actions that were lost when English and Welsh monastic houses were dissolved between 1536–40. But while this chantry did benefit the soul of Wykeham for this temporal investment, it did not increase divine service, merely diverted three of the daily masses of St. Swithun's towards a special remembrance of the bishop. This was a different scenario to that of the chantry masses of his successor, Bishop Richard Fox (ep. 1501–28) whose own agreement specifically requested two extra monks to be recruited to perform his chantry masses.<sup>72</sup>

72 A. Smith, "The Chantry Chapel of Richard Fox," in *Winchester Cathedral Record* 57 (Winchester, 1988), pp. 27–32, here p. 30.

Wykeham prepared for his death and the necessary intercession to relieve some of his suffering in purgatory during his lifetime as a long-term project, not as a deathbed imperative. While it can be seen that many wills were finalised on a death bed, concerning both temporal and spiritual concerns, the complexity of those from the “elites” of society needed greater consideration during their lifetime to accomplish their intercessory demands. In common with others of the period, his will asked for the prayers of friends and religious institutions in return for gifts of money, but he was not reliant on these to help his soul on entering purgatory. This was because his career as bishop had involved a programme of intercessory foundations from 1369 until his death. He did not expect to enter or stay in purgatory friendless or forgotten nor had he used his wealth only for the good of the Church through his educational foundations, but also for the good of his soul. His intercessory choices were conventional but not broad in their sphere, with a focus on education, especially for paupers.

What was different from other intercessory choices of the period was the scale due to the wealth of his position. In contemporary terms, Wykeham used this wealth wisely, for the good of his cathedral church, the Mother Church and his soul. His choices were personal, but the scale was enabled by his large income from his role as bishop of Winchester.

William Wykeham's intercessory gifts and foundations occurred in the period between 1348–49 (the Black Death in England) and the dissolution of all chantries, obits (annual anniversary masses), lights (candles in front of statues) and fraternities (religious guilds) in 1547, under the government of Edward VI (r. 1547–53), son of Henry VIII. In 1547 these activities were deemed to have stemmed from “blindness and ignorance,”<sup>73</sup> and this Act finally broke the relationship between the living and the dead in terms of intercessory prayers and masses. This doctrine had been under attack in the preceding decade, when in 1534 Henry VIII broke from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, to declare himself Head of the Church in England. In addition, Henry VIII dissolved all religious houses in England and Wales between 1536–40, and claimed all their assets, land and buildings. This earlier break with Rome needs to be seen in the context of the king's marriage problems and the refusal of the Pope to grant him a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), rather than a wholesale assault on the religious values of the Roman Church.

But these events did set the scene for changes in the religious climate over the next decade, when Henry VIII issued different injunctions that set out the

73 Tanner, ed., *Tudor Constitutional Documents*, p. 104.

religious context for the nation, for example, the Ten Articles of 1536, which accepted the value of prayers for the dead as a charitable act, but did not include any reference to purgatory, as this was not in the Bible.<sup>74</sup> This and the later injunction of 1539, stressed the value of the Scriptures to the population.<sup>75</sup> Henry VIII's parliament also enacted the First Chantry Act in 1545 that aimed to dissolve these religious foundations and, in the same way as the earlier Dissolution of the Monasteries, to claim their assets in light of a potential war with France. This Act stopped short of declaring them in the same terms adopted by his son's government only two years later, and had little effect.<sup>76</sup> Henry's death in January 1547 ensured that little was done to dissolve these institutions at this date.

If the dead were made aware of the suffrages of the living on their behalf in purgatory, Wykeham could be comforted by the large number of these performed on his behalf, unlike many others he was certainly not friendless. After the abolition of the doctrine of purgatory by Edward VI in the Second Chantry Act of 1547, intercession through masses ended, but unlike many others of this period, Wykeham still received suffrages for his soul through his two educational foundations after this date. Indeed the bishop still enjoys these suffrages, as these establishments still include daily prayers for their founder. Unlike many of this period, some of his intercessionary choices have proved to be truly perpetual.

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74 C.H. Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents 1485–1558* (London, 1971), pp. 804–05.

75 Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents 1485–1558*, p. 93.

76 Kreider, *English Chantries*, p. 183.

# “At Death’s Door”: The Authority of Deathbed Confessions in Medieval and Early Modern Swedish Law<sup>1</sup>

Mia Korpiola

## Introduction

In the year of the Lord 1477, the people of Stockholm heard how Magnus Persson accused Peder Mattsson of killing Peder *djäkn*,<sup>2</sup> who was probably Magnus’s relative. However, Peder Mattsson produced a letter in which those persons, who had been present when Peder *djäkn* was *in extremis* (*i [...] ytersta*), testified that the dying man had exculpated him from his death. Based on this, Peder Mattsson was freed from all accusations of homicide.<sup>3</sup> There were many similar cases in medieval and Reformation Sweden.

- 1 Parts of this chapter have been presented in earlier versions at the conference “Preparing for Death in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” organised on 15 March 2013 at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (HCAS), and at the meeting of the research group “The Making of Commercial Law: Common Practices and National Legal Rules from the Early Modern to the Modern Period,” funded by the Academy of Finland. I would like to thank the participants of these two events for their feedback and comments. The research for this article was conducted mainly at the HCAS and at the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, both of which provided me with inspiring interdisciplinary research atmospheres. Thanks are also due to the Academy of Finland for funding a short research period in the above-mentioned research project. I would also like to extend my thanks to Otfried Czaika for his comments, while a special thank you goes to Anu Lahtinen and Heikki Pihlajamäki for their many comments on a previous version of this text and suggestions for further literature.
- 2 *Djäkne* meant a deacon, a parish clerk (*klockare*), school boy or student, K.F. Söderwall, *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket* 1 (Lund, 1884–1918), pp. 189–90.
- 3 Emil Hildebrand and Johan Axel Almquist, eds. *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1474–1520*, 5 vols. (Stockholms stadsböcker från äldre tid, Series 2) 1–5 (Stockholm, 1917–33), 1:95–96 (5 July 1477): “*Per Mattson. Eodem die sagdes fore retto, ath Peder Matsson, her Stens tienare, är ledog ok lös fore thet tiltal, som Magnis Person talade til honom epter Pedher diekns dödha, förty han hadhe breff ok bewisning aff the, som nerwaro i for:na Peder dieckns ytersta, swa ludande, ath han vrsakade honom i sitt ytersta.*”

As is well known, the deathbed was the place where medieval and early modern people were expected to prepare their souls for death and afterlife. The Last Judgement awaited everyone and, consequently, all the activities of the dying, the *moriens*, were to be turned to the salvation of the soul. The deathbed became the scene for staging a “Good Death” with the assistance of the later medieval *ars moriendi* literature. Indeed, in the early Middle Ages, the very severe and public canonical penance usually followed deathbed repentance. However, in the course of the Middle Ages, private penance had largely replaced the former austere regime. But the nexus of the deathbed, confession, and penance prevailed. Confession and repentance of one’s sins, absolution, and Communion, possibly even extreme unction, were expected stages of the pious process of dying, which was to take place with resolute fortitude and acceptance of God’s will. Nevertheless, salvation could also necessitate more material considerations such as remedying wrongs, paying debts, and settling unfinished business.<sup>4</sup>

From a legal perspective, deathbed activities were usually connected to the last wishes of the dying, to their last requests and bequests, wills, and testaments. In fact, in medieval wills, illness was probably universally mentioned as the most common reason for making such a testament.<sup>5</sup> Yet quite apart from wills and testaments, the above-mentioned death of Peder *djåkn* indicates that deathbed confessions with a special status figure in other legal business, both in medieval Swedish law and in medieval and early modern legal practice, as well. My essay investigates this special role, which was expressed in King Magnus Eriksson’s (r. 1319–64) mid-fourteenth-century Town Law. The section discussing deathbed confessions is almost without parallel in the other Swedish medieval laws, i.e., the provincial laws<sup>6</sup> or in the older twin of King Magnus Eriksson’s Town Law, King Magnus Eriksson’s Law of the Realm, meant for the

4 For just a few examples out of the abundant literature, see, e.g. Rainer Rudolf, *Ars moriendi: Von der Kunst des heilsamen Lebens und Sterbens* (Cologne and Graz, 1957); Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*. Trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1981), esp. pp. 5–18; Austrar Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Aldershot, 2007); Jeffrey Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi: An examination, translation and collation of the manuscripts of the shorter Latin version*. Unpublished thesis, School of Graduate Studies, University of Ottawa, 1995, available online, <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/10313/1/MM07840.PDF>, last accessed on 25 Aug. 2017; Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), esp. pp. 4–27.

5 Steven Epstein, *Wills and Wealth in Medieval Genoa, 1150–1250* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984), pp. 48–49.

6 The surviving manuscripts of the Swedish provincial laws, nine of which have survived either partially or completely, can be dated to c. 1280–1350.

countryside. In addition to the medieval Swedish town law, I have also analysed legal documents of varying kind as well as medieval and early modern court records – mainly from the towns of Stockholm and Arboga.

In this essay, I will focus on the three main areas in which deathbed confessions surface in the Swedish legal sources: debt and property, homicide, and the confessions of soon-to-be executed criminals or women in labour. To my knowledge, this topic has not been investigated before at least in the Nordic countries. I will first demonstrate how deathbed confessions and testimonies were used in Swedish law and practice as an authoritative means of proof. After this, I will discuss the role of confession at the deathbed in the context of the medieval religious doctrine. I will also look for possible (foreign) influences behind these Swedish norms even if I will not necessarily be able to definitely identify any direct sources for them.

In this article, I argue that the authoritative role given to deathbed confessions and testimonies in Swedish law was influenced by the formalities of the canon law on making oral wills. In addition, it was influenced by and given authority through the spiritual preparations for death, as defined by the Church. Clerical confession practices at the deathbed and preparation of the soul for afterlife – later expressed in the *ars moriendi* literature – were probably significant here. Swedish procedural law strongly relied on oaths and witnesses far into the early modern period, and it had limited means of coping with vague cases such as unclear causal chains and word-against-word situations. Thus, deathbed confessions and testimonies were probably perceived as particularly sacral oaths, made more authoritative by the presence of death and the looming Divine Judgement.

### Settling Property before Death: Confessing to Property Claims and Debts

The Swedish mid-fourteenth-century Town Law, issued under the reign of King Magnus Eriksson, gave sworn deathbed confessions a special role.<sup>7</sup> The law

7 It is not known when the Town Law of King Magnus Eriksson was compiled and there are several suggestions as to its dating. Gerhard Hafström ("När tillkom Magnus Erikssons Allmänna Stadslag?," *Svensk juristtidning* [1960], pp. 537–38) suggested a more exact date: that it entered into force between March 1347 and September 1349, while Åke Holmbäck suggested a later and less exact date, 1355–57 or 1359–60; see Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wesén, eds., *Magnus Erikssons stadslag i nusvensk tolkning* [hereafter *MESL*], (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek) 7 (Lund, 1966), p. vii.

for the countryside that had probably been drafted earlier contains no identical section. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, deathbed confessions had special credibility and weight in legal practice all over the country. The Town Law gave particular credence to any sworn testimony made by a dying person. The confessed matter was considered proven and decided, provided at least three persons had witnessed it:

All a man or woman confesses or admits and makes his [or her] oath [upon] as is required on what he [or she] owes or another him [or her] or on something else shall be complete and confirmed [...].<sup>8</sup>

*Alth thz man eller kona i sin ytarsta tima kænnes oc tala oc gör sin eedh eptir som til bör. hwat han agher gielda nogot adhrum eller annar honum. eller oc vm annor maal thz scal wara fulth oc stadhukt [...].*<sup>8</sup>

Debt and credit relationships were especially mentioned in the law. In this case, the three witnesses were to be qualified according to the law. One was to be a person “who in the place of the dying person was to pay the debt or receive something, and two who were to witness under oath, if necessary,” what they had heard.<sup>9</sup> This meant that one witness was usually to be an heir or a close relative of the dying person. In legal practice, judging by the names of the witnesses alone, it is unclear whether this rule was followed in practice or not. The latter was probably more common as the closest heir was not necessarily present or even living in the vicinity.

Several cases from the late medieval towns of Arboga and Stockholm demonstrate how witnesses testified about deathbed confessions. In 1467, three men told under oath that they had been present when “in his last hour,” Laurens Persson confirmed his accounts “evoking the help of God and the holy sacraments.” According to Laurens, Fasbjörn Olofsson owed him the amount of money as was “visibly and clearly” apparent in his written account books. The town court of Arboga accepted this evidence and allowed Per Laurensen, one of the three men, who may have been the father or son of the deceased Laurens Persson, to act as Fasbjörn’s creditor and collect the debt by a legal

8 Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, Jordabalken (Chapter on Land) 17, p. 77; Elias Wessén, ed., *Söderköpings lagbok 1387*, (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek) 15 (Lund, 1971), Jordha balken 17, p. 37.

9 Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, Jordabalken 17, p. 77; Wessén, ed., *Söderköpings lagbok 1387*, Jordha balken 17, p. 37: “oc swa at thri men at minzsto warin ther nää: een then som giel-dith scal gielda a hans weghna eller vptagha. twe the som edhen sculu göra än thet widher kan thorfua. sighia oc sweria hwat the hördho.”

procedure.<sup>10</sup> In a late sixteenth-century case from Stockholm, Mårten Grip, a bailiff of a princess of the royal family, had been asked about his accounts on his deathbed (*låg på sit ytersta*), when a burgher and several other honest men had been called to his presence. Grip had assured that the accounts were up-to-date, and this was considered trustworthy in court later on.<sup>11</sup>

In 1592, Sven Elling had confessed "in his last hour" (*i sith ytersta timen*) that he had received for his share of a farm only eleven dalers in coins from Per Lassesson in Lexby. This had been witnessed by three men and, thus it was confirmed that Per Lassesson still owed Sven some more money at the time of the latter's death.<sup>12</sup> Judging by his deathbed confession, witnessed by three men, Anders Finne, again, seems to have been lending money on a large scale. According to the witnesses, he had said "in his ultimate death's [hour]" (*sadhe j sin ythirsta dødhez*) that Nils Ingevalsson of Hult and Nils Johansson of Gerla owed him 400 marks each, while Lars Pedersson of Gerla owed him 100 marks.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in 1477, in the town of Arboga, six men testified under oath that Jöns Torbjörnsson had said on his deathbed that he had satisfied what seems to have been his co-heirs, his brothers and his brothers' children, as far as the inheritance went.<sup>14</sup> Thus, he no longer owed them anything. Olof Kylmerawta also stated on his deathbed, in the presence of at least three witnesses, that he owed Magnus Olsson nothing.<sup>15</sup>

People also confessed *in extremis* to money owed to others. In 1498, Bertil Resener's widow produced four witnesses at the town court of Stockholm to testify that they had been present when Bertil Resener had lain on his deathbed (*lagh j sit ytersta*) and uttered about his debts. Less than half an hour before breathing his last, Bertil Resener had confessed that he was only indebted to Cornelius the Minter, and to Hinrik Bryning he owed one mark.<sup>16</sup> Obviously,

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- 10 Erik Noréen and Torsten Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 4 vols., (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskiftsällskapet, series 1) 53 (Uppsala, 1935–50), 1:197 (30 Jan. 1464).
  - 11 Folke Sleman, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker från år 1592* [hereafter *STb från år 1592*] (Stockholm, 1953), 27 Oct. 1600, p. 57.
  - 12 Sven Grauers, ed., *Nya Lödöse tänkeböcker (1586–1621)*, (Skrifter utgivna till Göteborgs stads trehundraårsjubileum genom jubileumsutställningens publikationskommitté) 6 (Gothenburg, 1923), 24 Apr. 1592, p. 265.
  - 13 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 2:318 (15 Oct. 1487).
  - 14 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 2:84–85 (28 Apr. 1477): "*han fornøgth hade sinom brødrom och brodirs barnom alt arfft.*"
  - 15 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 2:123 (17 Dec. 1485).
  - 16 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1474–1520*, 3:360 (31 Mar. 1498): "[...] *tha Bertill Resaner lagh j sit ytersta och sade, at han jngom skylloger war vtan Cornelius myntare, ok Hinrik Brýningk war han j mark tenetur.*"



Resener's widow needed to establish his late husband's debts before the joint estate of the spouses could be divided in half between her and the heirs according to the law.<sup>17</sup> Some deathbed confessions related to the ownership or possession of property belonging to the estate – or not, as in one such case from 1447. Here, two men, one of whom, judging by his name (Helge Toresson), may have been the son of the deceased, witnessed that Tore Flogell had confessed on his deathbed that he had sold Björn Radgersson a moiety of a forest for ten marks. This sum Flogell acknowledged to have received.<sup>18</sup>

Such confessions defining the extent of the estate could also deal with the whereabouts of such property, as in a very detailedly described case from Lödöse in 1360. It gives an unusually vivid tableau of the deathbed of Hinrik Priswalk, a burgher of the town. At least his sister Tala, his sons, and two burghers of Lödöse had been at his deathbed when Hinrik Priswalk's property in cash was discussed. Herman Priswalk, one of Hinrik's sons, had initiated the discussion: "My father, where are the gold and silver coins and the Swedish money that we know you to have?" The dying man has answered: "My sister sitting here has everything." This his sister Tala had acknowledged. However, Herman may have been apprehensive about the safety of this cash as he had continued: "Dear father, make public in the presence of these discreet men the quality or and quantity of your money and property." The father had protested that this was of no use as he and his son knew it all anyway and her sister was in the possession of the property. Tala had reassured "her dearest sons that all the goods would be theirs and not a single coin would be withheld." However, Herman's fears concerning the trustworthiness of his aunt were justified as she, using the subterfuge of retrieving the inheritance of her three nephews, absconded to Stralsund in Germany with the silver and gold, having only handed over some Swedish currency to her nephews.<sup>19</sup>

17 Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, Ärvdabalken (Chapter on Inheritance) 17, p. 61.

18 Database of Swedish medieval charters, 27 March 1447, SDHK-nr: 25112. See also the original document, <http://www3.ra.se/sdhk/bild/25112.JPG>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

19 Ernst Nygren and Jan Liedgren, eds., *Diplomatarium Suecanum* [hereafter *DS*] VII (Stockholm, 1976), 13 Apr. 1360, doc. 6261, p. 309: "[E]orum amita Tala, relicta Rodgeri Remaslaghara, tunc temporis villana nostra manens, dum in extremis fratris sui Hinrici, eorundem iuuenum patris, presens esset, presentibus fidedignis viris, omnia et singula bona fratris sui predicti in aureis, grossis anglicis et denarijs Sweuis existentia se habere fatebatur, super qua recognitione duo ciues nostri de tunc temporis presentibus, videlicet Radekinus Kiiil et Johannes Sartor, testimonium perhibuerunt, dicentes: 'Hermannus Pryzuwalk patrem suum interrogauit: Pater mi, vbi sunt aurei, argentei et Sueuici denarij, quos scimus vos habere? Cui respondens pater ait: Soror mea hic sedens habet omnia. – Et illa respondebat: –

In certain cases, deathbed testimonies attempted to define the presumptive heirs or influence the postmortem division of the inheritance. In a lawsuit from the 1590s, on his deathbed, Johan of Gåla had apparently denied the legitimate birth of Anna Arvidsdotter, daughter of Arvid of Gåla, and thereby her right to inherit the property of her parents. However, two women – of which one through a written statement as she was herself on her sickbed – testified under oath that Anna Arvidsdotter was the legitimate daughter of her father Arvid and his wife. Thus, Anna was deemed the heir to the disputed land.<sup>20</sup> In this case, the deathbed claim of Johan of Gåla was disproved with counter-evidence. On the deathbed of Marten Tams, on the other hand, his heirs agreed on how the property should be divided after him as witnessed by the priest.<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes, however, the deathbed confessions related to the property and debts of others. In 1457, the Arboga magistrates heard the statements of two witnesses about what Nils Andersson confessed on his deathbed about the money that had been raised from a town house that he and another man had been entrusted to sell. Nils had explained how the money raised from the sale had been divided, which obviously helped to determine the rightful owner of the property.<sup>22</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, deathbed confessions considering debt as well as ownership and possession of property were reckoned an authoritative means of establishing facts in medieval and early modern Sweden. In more literary cultures, it may have been more common to list the name of one's debtors and the amount owed in a will.<sup>23</sup> A few such mentions can also be found in Swedish documents, but they are relatively rare.<sup>24</sup> However, the authority of

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*Ita. – Filius autem egi[t] Care pater, manifestate huius discretis viris presentibus quantitatem et qualitatem denariorum et bonorum quos habet. At illi pater dixit: Fili mi, quid prodest tibi, si aperis hominum ora? Tu scis omnia, sicut ego, et ipsa habet illa, sicut dixi. Illa vero ait: Filii mei karissimi, omnia vestra erunt et vnus obulus ex huius non subtrahatur.' Elapso aliquo tempore prenominata Tala, filiis fratris sui antedictis modico de pecunia Sweua commisso, Sundis [iuit] simulans se redituram cetera, ut dic[i]t bona secum deportandum."*

20 Grauers, ed., *Nya Lödöse tänkeböcker* (1586–1621), 27 June 1596, 23 Aug. 1596, 22 Nov. 1596, 23 Nov. 1596, pp. 374, 377, and 384–85.

21 Joh. Ax. Almquist, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1568–1575*, (Stockholm, 1936), 27 Feb. 1570, p. 164.

22 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 1:71 (4 July 1457).

23 E.g. Epstein, *Wills and Wealth in Medieval Genoa*, pp. 204–05 and 238.

24 One such example is the will of the aristocratic Nils Sigridsson, *lagman* (provincial judge) of Värend, who listed both his creditors and debtors with the sums in his will, Joh. Gust. Liljegren, ed., *DS* 11, (Stockholm, 1837), 16 July 1299, doc. 1278, p. 293. See also the will of a man called Dag from 1293, *ibid.*, sine dato, doc. 1084, p. 151.

the voice from the deathbed was also expressed in several other variations that demonstrate the many uses of the institution.

### Homicide: Establishing Causality and Culpability

Assault and violence were among the most common crimes in the Swedish town court protocols both in the Middle Ages as well as in the Reformation period. However, these incidents have been called largely “mundane and commonplace” as most instances involved bruises and minor wounds.<sup>25</sup> In case of violence, the victim (if alive) or his/her closest relative was considered the injured party, in Swedish *målsägande* (orig. *malseghande*, lit. “owner of the suit”), who had the right to prosecute the crime in court. However, he or she was not allowed to settle privately or clandestinely with the assailant, and defraud the king and the community of their portion of the fines. Moreover, if the crime was notorious or the wounds had been surveyed and the crime publicised, the town officials could take to public prosecution. If a person had been so badly wounded he or she was unable to come to court to show the physical damage, the royal bailiff, the mayors and town councillors inspected the injured and presented their findings to the town court under oath. Their testimony was accepted as proof.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the sickbed was not a private but rather a public space.

It would seem that whom the wounded blamed or exonerated *in extremis* significantly determined whether that person could later be accused and convicted of causing the death or not. In 1473, Påvel the Innkeeper and two other men swore at the town court of Arboga that they had been present when Sigurd Pedersson admitted on his deathbed that neither Lauris *diækn* nor Knut Jonsson had caused his death.<sup>27</sup> In another case that may have been related to slander, Mattis, a Stockholm burgher, had accused Olof Hinriksson, a burgher from Västerås, of the death of a woman. However, five witnesses proved that she had not blamed Olof Hinriksson in any way when she had lain on her sickbed.<sup>28</sup>

In another case, the forgiving attitude of the victim was central for the more lenient punishment as the treatment of the homicide Peter Rudhe demonstrates. It was quite obvious that Rudhe had been the bane of Claus Lydke

25 Eva Österberg and Dag Lindström, *Crime and Social Control in Medieval and Early Modern Swedish Towns*, (Studia Historica Upsaliensia) 152 (Uppsala, 1988), p. 153.

26 E.g. Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, Rådstugubalken (Chapter on the Town Court) 10, p. 174.

27 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 2:3 (1 Feb. 1473).

28 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 5:151 (29 Apr. 1517).

through a deadly assault at the Cornmarket. Nevertheless, Lydke had forgiven his slayer before his death (*Claus Lydkæ gaff Peter Rude sin dódh til*) as was witnessed at court by his confessor, Franciscan friar Claus, by another friar, as well as three other men. Because of this, Hans Lydke, Claus Lydke's heir, did not insist on the death penalty, but was prepared to accept a negotiated friendly settlement. However, this concord involving a two-hundred-mark compensation, fines, and some pilgrimages within Sweden took several rounds of negotiations to reach.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, a married woman, Olof Karlsson's daughter, who had been killed in a breach of the peace of the house, "had in her last moments" (*i thet ytersta*) been asking for the life of the culprit to be saved. Consequently, Olof Karlsson as the injured party and the "honest matrons" were prepared to ask the royal bailiff, mayor, and town councillors to have mercy on him. This was granted, apparently mainly based on the fact that the victim has pleaded for her slayer on her deathbed. According to the verdict, the culprit had to go on pilgrimages.<sup>30</sup>

Hardly surprisingly, the capital city of Stockholm was the probably the most violent town in the Swedish realm, and between 1475 and 1624, up to nine persons were killed there every year.<sup>31</sup> During many of the years, there was just one or two – or even no – casualties, and so these homicides were probably the talk of the town which in the 1460s had perhaps 6,000–7,000 inhabitants.<sup>32</sup>

When studying the available texts, one occasionally gets the impression that the traffic at a wounded person's bedside was quite lively because a lot of people, potential witnesses to future deathbed confessions, came and went. In 1526, eight men had been present when Thomas of Danzig had "freely and voluntarily" (*onöd gat och otvingat*) forgiven "the honest and well-born man" Peder Hard who had stung him in the guildhall. Thomas had added that if "God wanted to call him in the same illness, his heirs would not have any complaint in the matter as he had forgiven everything 'for the sake of God.'"<sup>33</sup>

29 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 4:299–300 (12 Apr. 1512): "gaff sigh j ene försonen och wenlig forlickning, som tha fframedelis ffrörhandlet wart." On the use of penitential pilgrimages for, e.g. atoning homicides, see Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church* 2, (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 123–35; Cyrille Vogel, "Le pèlerinage penitential," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 38 (1964), pp. 113–53; Christian Krötzel, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.–15. Jahrhundert)*, (Studia Historica) 46 (Helsinki, 1994), pp. 120–33.

30 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:309 (22 Aug. 1481).

31 Österberg and Lindström, *Crime and Social Control*, pp. 79–87 and 92.

32 Staffan Högberg, *Stockholms historia*, 1 (Stockholm, 1981), p. 76.

33 Ludvig Larsson, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkebok 1524–29*, (Skrifter utgivna av Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund) 11 (Lund, 1929–40), 28 Feb. 1526 (*fferia 4ta for Oculj*), p. 99.

The deathbed of Hans Ysagrim of Stockholm seems to have been another such busy place. The identities of the persons who assaulted him and finally caused his death seem to have been the subject of many rounds of discussions. First, on 14 April 1477, the town court fined Laurens Magnusson for being an accomplice in the killing of Hans Ysagrim.<sup>34</sup> The dying man himself had asserted on his deathbed that Johan the Tall (*Joan longe/longe Joan*) had hit him on the head with a spear shaft. This was also confirmed by eyewitnesses. On 26 April 1477, Hans Dingstade witnessed at the town court that Hans Ysagrim had told him of this assault “at his last breath” (*i sith ytersta*).<sup>35</sup>

Then some days later, two nautical gentlemen, Captain Pål the Blockmaker and Captain Henrik Skaak, swore an oath on relics at the town court that they had been present and witnessed as Johan the Tall had hit Hans Ysagrim.<sup>36</sup> A month later, ten men made their appearance at the town court, all of them testifying to hearing the detailed deathbed confession of Hans Ysagrim that Johan had hit him. However, it seems that a knife wound had actually caused his death.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, some days later six men stated that Hans Ysagrim had acquitted the above-mentioned Laurens Magnusson of his death on the condition of that the latter made some long pilgrimages abroad (St. James's grave in Santiago de Compostela and “the sacred blood in Vilsnak” – the Holy Blood of Wilsnak, present-day Bad Wilsnak, in the diocese of Havelberg, Brandenburg).<sup>38</sup> Finally, three years later, based on the words of Hans Ysagrim on his deathbed – “which were known by good men” (*som godom mannom witterliget är*) – the town court of Stockholm fined Johan Eriksson the Tall for the killing.<sup>39</sup> Even when there had been no eye-witness statements, it was quite obvious that after these testimonies, Johan was facing a conviction for homicide as Hans Ysagrim, quite literally the injured party, had consistently blamed Johan for his imminent death. Hans obviously believed that there was a causal connection between Johan's assault and its lethal outcome.

34 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:92 (14 Apr. 1477).

35 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds. *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:94 (26 Apr. 1477): “Eodem die vitnade Hanis Dingxstade fore rettin, ath Hanis Ysagrim sagde i sith ytersta, ath Joan longe slog honom medh eth stycke aff en sperstaka i hoffwdet.”

36 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds. *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:95 (30 Apr. 1477): “Longe Joan. Eodem die giorde skipper Pawall klossemakare ok skipper Henrik Skaak therres eedh pa helgedomana, swa athe nerwaro ok sagho, thet longe Joan slogh Hanis Ysagrim i hoffwdet medh eth stycke aff en spärstaka.”

37 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:105 (21 May 1477).

38 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:106 (21 May 1477).

39 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:255 (26 July 1480).

Also the circumstances of the crime could be the topic of the deathbed confession. For example, Gregers the Sword-sharpener, Lasse Skutte the Shoemaker and Hans Laurensen witnessed in 1481 that Kristiern the Smith had stated before he died (*i sitt ytersta*) that master Laurens, the town executioner, had held his arm when Henrik, usher of the Stockholm town council, had stung him.<sup>40</sup> In this case, the entry leaves it unclear whether the hangman had attempted to restrain the parties or acted as an accomplice.

Considering the low knowledge of medicine in medieval and early modern Sweden, wounds could take a nasty turn and become fatal. This could make any sickbed into a deathbed at a relatively short notice in the Middle Ages. In sixteenth-century Picardy, France, chest, back or stomach wounds – especially if made by a knife or sword – were reported as the most lethal, most often causing death immediately or on the same day. While the delay between the assault leading to mortal injuries and the eventual death was usually relatively short, more than a half of the victims survived at least to the following day. Almost 20 per cent lived another 2 to 7 days before they died, 23 per cent lingered on during 1–3 weeks and certain individuals even longer.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, many deathbed scenes could become protracted.

The more extended the period between the violence and the eventual fatality, the more unclear the causal link between the two became. Several medieval German town laws had issued limitations on when the death was no longer considered to have followed from the assault. For example, the town law of Freising from the early fourteenth century drew the line at the return of the wounded to his normal life. If the wounds had healed and the victim had gone "to church, to the street and [taken] care of his business just like before the wounding," the assailant could no longer be charged for homicide. However, if the wound had not healed, accusations of homicide could still be made. If the wounds had not healed within a year and a day, the aggressor could no longer be held responsible for the demise of his or her victim.<sup>42</sup> These notions can also be found in several German town laws (e.g. Hamburg), while others – such

40 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds. *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 1:309 (20 Aug. 1481).

41 Isabelle Paresys, *Aux marges du royaume: Violence, justice et société en Picardie sous François 1<sup>er</sup>* (Paris, 1998), pp. 42–43.

42 E.g. 24, Hans-Kurt Claußen, ed., *Freisinger Rechtsbuch*, (Germanenrecht, Neue Folge, Abteilung Stadtrechtbücher) 1 (Weimar, 1941), pp. 22–23: "Ist daz di wunten gehailt sint, daz si zuo gevallen sint, und der man ze chirchen und ze strazze gêt und alles sein geschæft schafft, alz er ez vor hât geschæft, ê daz er wund wurd, sô sol man den, der di wunden tân hât, nicht mêr an sprechen um den tôtslach, ez sei denn daz di wunten nicht ze recht zuo gehailt sein, daz si wider auf presten und denn der man dar an stirbet. Sô mag man wol den, der si geslagen hât, ansprechen um den tôtslach. Ist aver daz di wunden gantz beleibent uber jâr und

as the law of Lübeck – issued a specific, shorter limit of fifteen days, for which time the culprit was to remain in the town gaol.<sup>43</sup>

Such notions spread to Swedish town law under the influence of German town laws.<sup>44</sup> The Swedish *Björköarätten* is assumed to have been the first law of Stockholm, possibly stemming from the latter part of the thirteenth century, perhaps the 1280s.<sup>45</sup> According to this law, one was only considered liable of the injuries of a person until that person had been able to attend church and the market “to buy and sell.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the early fourteenth-century law of Visby, the main town of the island of Gotland and an important centre of international trade, discussed a situation in which the victim of a wounding was in peril of his or her life. In such circumstances, the culprit was not allowed to set bail without the consent of the wounded, and for thirty days, he or she had to wait incarcerated in the town gaol to know whether the victim recuperated or not. If within this time, the wounded was well enough to go to church, the market or the bathhouse, the assailant was to be freed from gaol and possible homicide charges. Still, he had to pay for the victim’s medical treatment and expenses as well as give sureties for the fines both to the victim and the town.<sup>47</sup> The law limited the responsibility of the culprit to thirty days or a certain degree of recovery within this time. Similarly, a person who had been so thoroughly beaten or wounded that he or she became bed-ridden and was in

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*einen tach, sô ist er ledich, der si geslagen hât oder gestochen, und mag in nicht mêr ansprechen um den tôtslach.*” He could still be liable for the wounds and medical costs.

43 Wilhelm Ebel, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des lübisches Rechts 1: Dreizehn Stücke zum Prozeß- und Privatrecht*, (Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck) 14 (Lübeck, 1950), pp. 48–50.

44 Cf. Holmbäck and Wessén, who have argued that the *Björköarätten* has only received limited influences from German town law, Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, “Inledning, VI: Om Björköarätten,” in *Sveriges landskapslagar: Tolkade och förklarade för nutidens svenskar* [hereafter *SLL*], 5 vols, eds. Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén (Stockholm, 1933–46), 5:xcvi.

45 Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén assume that the *Björköarätten* is from the period between c. 1250 when the town was restructured by Earl Birger (Birger Jarl, c. 1210–66), the *de facto* ruler of Sweden, and 1296 when the provincial law of Uppland was confirmed, Holmbäck and Wessén, “Inledning,” *SLL*, 5:xcvi. Staffan Högberg (*Stockholms historia*, 1, p. 24) has assumed that the law dated from the 1280s. However, as the only existing manuscript of the *Björköarätt* was written for the town of Lödöse around 1345 (Holmbäck and Wessén, “Inledning, VI,” p. xcii), we cannot know with certainty the content of the original *Björköarätt*.

46 14:6, *Björköarätten*, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 5:459.

47 1:31 “on wounds imperilling one’s life” (*van wunden an lües vare*), Wisby Stadslag in C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Corpus Iuris Sueo-Gotorum Antiqui* [hereafter *CISGA*], 8 (Lund, 1853), p. 46.

a life-threatening condition could confirm the identity of the aggressor by taking an oath together with five oath-helpers.<sup>48</sup>

However, some Swedish provincial laws limited the liability of the attacker for several potentially life-threatening wounds to a year and a day, after which he or she could not be held responsible for the killing.<sup>49</sup> Some laws, like the Law of Södermanland (confirmed in 1327), differentiated between different body parts by specifying that the assailant was responsible for wounds only until they were healed and the skin had grown on the wound. However, wounds on the head and torso were an exception: the liability for homicide was extended to a year and a day unless the victim had already accepted fines for the wounds shortening the period.<sup>50</sup> Following the same principles, King Magnus Eriksson's laws limited the liability of the assailant for wounds to the head and the abdomen – or other potentially lethal wounds – to a year and a day, after which he or she could not be held responsible. If a fine had already been paid for the wounding, but the patient perished within the time limit, the culprit could no longer be executed for the crime. Moreover, the question of whether the death was caused by the wounds or not would be resolved by a twelve-man jury.<sup>51</sup> Despite this, there was room for varying practices. In a case resolved in Vadstena in 1609, the sculptor Maximilianus had thrown his dagger into the breast of Jöns the Shoemaker more than a year previously, but the wound was observed not to have healed because of Jöns's own carelessness. Jöns also refused the sum offered in reconciliation. The court decided on Maximilianus's fine and compensation – the latter to be given to the poor. Thereafter, he was no longer liable for Jöns's medical treatment as he had been until then, nor Jöns's death in case that followed.<sup>52</sup>

48 1:34 "on thorough beatings" (*van dorchknypplinghe*), Wisby Stadslag, Schlyter, ed., in *CISGA*, 8, pp. 48–49.

49 E.g. Manhelgdsbalken (Chapter on the Peace of Men) [hereafter M] 10, Hälsingelagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 3:329; M 25, Upplandslagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 1:102; Slagsmålsbalken (Chapter on Brawling) 9, Äldre Västgötalagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 5:63.

50 M 4, Södermannalagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 3:165; M 22, Västmannalagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 2:75.

51 Såråmålsbalken 1 (Chapter on Intentional Wounding) 15, Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén, eds., *Magnus Erikssons landslag i nysvensk tolkning*, (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek) 6 (Lund, 1962), p. 256; Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, pp. 264–65; Såråmålsbalken 1 (Chapter on Intentional Wounding) 16, Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, pp. 264–65; Wessén, ed., *Söderköpings lagbok 1387*, 12, p. 104.

52 Georg J.V. Ericsson, ed., *Vadstena stads äldsta tänkeböcker ("Domboken") 1577–1610* [hereafter *vst*] (Uppsala, 1945–52), 9 Oct. 1609, p. 435. For cases in which the victim seems to



Only one of the Swedish provincial laws, the Law of Dalarna, contained a reference to deathbed confessions. As most other provincial laws, it limited the responsibility of the assailant for the lethal consequences of the injuries to the time when the wounds had healed and “skin had covered the wound.” However, injuries to the head and torso were exceptions, and here, the limit of one year and a day was applied. Nevertheless, the law went on to rule that if the battered person confessed on his or her deathbed in the presence of the priest and other men that an illness had caused the death instead of the wounds, the charge of homicide could no longer be made.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the limitations of liability in Swedish law, the legal practice as to the causal link between assault and death remained unclear. Exceptionally, the accused could take an oath confirmed by compurgators that the victim’s death had been caused by a disease and not the injuries of the assault.<sup>54</sup> In other cases, the long time (from 6 months to 2.5 years) that passed between the fatal assault and the death did break the causal link to the death in legal practice. “Four to five months was such a time when the link started to seem uncertain in the eyes of the sixteenth-century people.”<sup>55</sup>

However, more commonly, the opinion of the dying seems to have been more relevant as far as acquittals of guilt were concerned. Occasionally, the dying patient was recorded to have considered that the fatal condition was not caused by the assault, but by an illness. In an Arboga case from 1494, Jon the Kettle-maker (Jon *grytare*) admitted that he was dying “of a real pestilence.” When asked specifically whether he accused Mågens Ivarsson for his death, Jon had told both his confessor and three witnesses that he “did not accuse Mågens of anything but good.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the acquittals by the dying persons seem to have been considered binding for their closest kinsfolk, who could no longer press charges. In another case, Magnus “Pigerii” had been hit on the head by a stone thrown by cleric Nicolaus Finvidi who had acted in self-defence as

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have caused his death by neglecting the advice of the doctor or there was no causal link between the act of violence and death, and the assailant was still fined for accidental homicide, see Pentti Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500-luvun ihminen oikeuskatsomustensa valossa*, (Turun yliopiston julkaisu) B:33 (Turku, 1949), pp. 122–24.

53 M 11, Dalalagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 2:32.

54 Heikki Ylikangas, “Henkirikos keskiajan lopun ja uuden ajan alun Suomessa,” *Oikeustiede – Jurisprudentia* 8 (1976), pp. 88–140, at p. 104. See also an opposite case in which the dead woman’s relatives had to bind the assailant to causing the death with the oath of six compurgators, Ericsson, ed., *vst*, 4 Mar. 1609, p. 196.

55 Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500-luvun ihminen*, pp. 126–27, quotation p. 127.

56 7 Nov. 1496, Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 3:65. See also 27 Aug. 1544, Joh. Ax. Almquist, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1544–1548* (Stockholm, 1936), pp. 17–18. See also Ericsson, ed., *vst*, 21 July 1606, pp. 390–91.

Magnus and his friend had assaulted him with knives and swords. Some weeks later, Magnus had been asked whether he felt that Nicolaus and the stone thrown by him had threatened his life. He had denied this. Some weeks later, when Magnus had succumbed to a pestilence and was on his deathbed, he was asked again whether Nils had caused his death. Magnus repeated his denial, which, however, did not prevent Magnus's relatives from having officials arrest Nicolaus and put him on trial.<sup>57</sup> Obviously, the persons present at Magnus's deathbed and heard what he said about Nicolaus Finvidi had an important role in whether the cleric was acquitted or condemned for the crime.

Under comparable circumstances, Erik *bonde* came to the town court of Stockholm and acquitted Olof Spinke of the killing of his half-brother, Lasse Jonsson. Again there had been many witnesses to Lasse Jonsson's deathbed confession. Five men, three of which were shoemakers, had heard how Lasse had "personally himself at his sickbed" cleared Olof of his death.<sup>58</sup> At the assizes of Tjust, the father and husband of Katarina exonerated a man called Guse of her death, based on what she had said "during her last hour."<sup>59</sup> On another occasion, when asked by the priest at her deathbed before Christmas, a woman from Sibbo said that she could not accuse Matts Andersson, who had hit her during a fight on the feast of St. Laurence in August, of causing her death, nor could she acquit him. She wished to leave the matter to her three sons, who at the end decided to settle the matter with Matts instead of insisting on capital punishment.<sup>60</sup> In this case, about four months had elapsed between the injuries sustained during the fight and the death, which again made the causation unclear.

In certain other cases, the deathbed exoneration of the dying did not wholly free the accidental killer from responsibility. Birgitta Mattsdotter's death had been caused by a very unlucky chain of events. She had been slashing and

57 5 Aug. 1486, Sara Risberg, ed. and Kirsi Salonen, intr., *Auctoritate Papae: The Church Province of Uppsala and the Apostolic Penitentiary 1410–1526*, (Diplomatarium Suecanum Appendix, Acta Pontificum Suecica) 2, Acta Poenitentiaria (Stockholm, 2008), p. 334: "*denuo in ultimis suis similiter inquisitus dictum exponentem illius mortis causam minime fuisse neque esse dixit et excusavit.*"

58 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 4:208 (30 Aug. 1511): "*gaff Oleff Spinke ffri, qwit och aldelis lidogh och loss fför then mansdøde.*" See also Landsarkivet i Uppsala (Regional State Archive of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden) [hereafter ULA], Uppsala domkapitels arkiv (archive of the cathedral chapter of Uppsala) [hereafter UDA], A 11, Uppsala domkapitels protokoll 1593–1608 (records of the cathedral chapter of Uppsala) [hereafter UDP], 12 May 1596, fol. 117r.

59 Carl Silfverstolpe, ed., *Svenskt diplomatarium* [hereafter SD] II, (Stockholm, 1879–87), 13 June 1411, doc. 1434, p. 397: "*epther thy som quinnan sielff kändhe, i henna ytersta tima.*"

60 Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500-luvun ihminen*, pp. 127–28.

burning together with many other people when she had asked Matts Stafansson to fell a tree which was in her way. Matts had done as requested, but the falling tree had hit a utensil, which in turn had hit Birgitta who had been thrown on the ground. The injuries Birgitta received in the fall were so severe that she had died the following day after pronouncing Matts free from guilt. Yet, Matts was sentenced to a small fine for accidental homicide in 1585.<sup>61</sup>

The dying person could even confess that he or she had provoked the dispute that had led to the violence and the fatal injuries. In 1505, in Stockholm, six men – including one of the town councillors – witnessed that Niklis Mattsson had spoken to the servant Per Helsing, who admitted to having started the affray (*perlamenth*) between them. Per had admitted that he himself had been the cause of his own injury, “and if God did call him from this world, his family and relatives were by no means to blame anyone for his death.” The dying man willingly forgave his death as he himself had caused it.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, the statistics by Isabelle Paresys on early sixteenth-century Picardy indicate that only rarely did the dying person exonerate the person who had caused his or her death by admitting to being the aggressor.<sup>63</sup>

Conversely, the words of the dying person could also lead to less mercy for the culprit if they indicated that the assailant had acted in an especially blameworthy manner and that the victim preferred a just punishment rather than pleaded for mercy on the assailant. In 1614, in Stockholm, widow Karin and Sven, the preacher of Södermalm, were heard as witnesses to what the royal bailiff Anders Larsson had said on his deathbed although there was an eyewitness to the actual deed. Anders Larsson had been grievously assaulted by Lars Ahnfastsson, who had first hit him on the mouth and then driven a sword in his breast. Karin witnessed that the dying man had lamented on his deathbed how blamelessly he had fallen victim to this “misfortune” (*olýcka*) and that he was not guilty of the accusations that his assailant had launched at him. The priest Sven and the barber Hans told a similar story: at his last (*på sith ýthersta*), Anders Larsson had claimed that he had done nothing to provoke the deadly attack. Therefore, he had “asked God Almighty and the High Authority to ensure that Lars would be punished properly for such a presumptuous crime.” Burgher Nils Olofsson, the eyewitness to the murder, recounted

61 Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500-luvun ihminen*, p. 120. See also *ibid.*, p. 127.

62 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 4:95 (5 Nov. 1505): “ok om Gud wylde hanom j thenne kranckdom her aff verlden kalla, tha skulle hans frender eller slecht ey macht haffue hanom klandre eller pa thale hans lyff j nager matte. Sin dødth gaff han hanom veluileliga til, epter han thet sielff forskullet hade.”

63 Paresys, *Aux marges du royaume*, p. 45.

a similar story.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in two Finnish cases, the deathbed accusations of the dying gave impetus to the death penalty. At one instance, the victim had said *in extremis* to the culprit in the presence of two witnesses that he was dying because of the assailant's blows. In the other case, a woman dying of a prolonged and terrible illness accused, in the presence of the local vicar, Lars Andersson of killing her by witchcraft.<sup>65</sup> At these instances, the deathbed confessions could also be used for corroborating the eyewitness testimony that the victim had not provoked the deed in any way and that there were no special mitigating circumstances to warrant a more lenient punishment.

Occasionally, as can be observed in these cases, the witnesses were women or priests. In the above-mentioned case of the burgher Mattis accusing Olof Hinriksson of causing the death of a woman, the five witnesses included three women and the deceased woman's confessor.<sup>66</sup> Even if the capacity of women to act as witnesses to wills was sometimes called into question,<sup>67</sup> on these occasions nobody raised any doubt of their trustworthiness or capacity to witness deathbed confessions.

The witnesses are described as taking an oath – sometimes it is mentioned that they swore on relics or "put their hands on the books and swore" (*lagdhe theris handh vppa bokena oc sworo*)<sup>68</sup> – and reporting what they themselves had seen and heard at the deathbed. Witnesses later testified at court whom the dying person accused of the crime or that the dying person had acquitted the suspected malefactor. In fact, the possible causal relationship between

64 Nils Staf, ed., *Stockholms stads och Norrmalm stads tänkeböcker från år 1592*, 8 (1614–15), (Stockholm, 1966), 4 June 1614, p. 27: "*bidlandes Gudh alzmechtigh och höge öfuerheten, att se her till, så att Lars för sådhanna öfuerdådeligh bedrifne mißgärning motte tages i tilbör-ligitt straff*."

65 Renvall, *Suomalainen 1500-luvun ihminen*, pp. 127 and 144–45.

66 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 5:151 (29 Apr. 1517). For another case also witnessed by the dying man's confessor (*scriptafadher*), see Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 3:65 (7 Nov. 1496).

67 Nils Staf, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker från år 1592*, 5 (Stockholm, 1966), 14 Dec. 1603, pp. 163–64.

68 Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 3:65 (7 Nov. 1496): "*fferia 2:da post festum omnium sanctorum Tha war jeppe andersson vppa radzstugonne som höffuizman war for folkit ok niels gregersson niels olsson oc lagdhe theris handh vppa bokena oc sworo at the nær ware i ælsnabben tha som jon grytare dødhe gudh hans syæll nadhe Tha sworo the at han war wdspritader oc dødhe aff rette pestilencia oc war hanum serdelis aatsport om han skyldadhe nokot maghens yuersson for sin dødth. Tha sadge han badhe for sin scriptafadher oc for thøm athan enkitit skyldhade maghens yuersson annat æn got.*" See also Noréen and Wennström, eds., *Arboga stads tänkebok*, 1:71 (4 July 1457): "*lado sina hænder oppa bokena ok bado sig swa gud til hjælp.*"

claimed assault and cause of death seems to have been the topic of many of the deathbed scenes that can be found in Swedish late-medieval and early modern court records. Thus, one can conclude that even if nearly all provincial laws and Magnus Eriksson's Law for the Countryside did not mention the topic, the rule of the authority of deathbed confessions seems to have been largely followed as a legal custom all over medieval and early modern Sweden.

### **The Confession of the Soon-to-be-Executed and Parturient in Labour: Acquitting or Condemning Suspected Accomplices**

In the course of the High Middle Ages, not only in religion but also in criminal procedure, the role of the confession became increasingly important. The role of the confession also became fundamental in the inquisitorial procedure, developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and aiming at discovering the truth. As time went by, in learned Romano-canonical law, the confession became known as the "queen of evidence" (*confessio est regina probationum*).<sup>69</sup> Yet, the confession was considered to have its limitations as people could falsely confess to untrue things for their own personal interests. Only confession and public fame together were not considered sufficient in certain cases, unless worthy witnesses testified to it.<sup>70</sup>

Despite such reservations in some special cases, a confessed crime usually led to conviction. However, only some parts of the Romano-canonical law of proof found their way to Swedish law and practice, which relied heavily on oaths and oath-helpers. Confession was also often mentioned in legal practice, as medieval town court records attest. The mid-fourteenth-century Town Law contains a passage in which confessed crimes were considered proven just as definitively as if proven by witnesses. This confession had to take place in the town court and for a crime that was punishable by the death penalty.<sup>71</sup>

69 E.g. Mathias Schmoeckel, "Die Entwicklung der *confessio* als Beweismittel," in *Der Einfluss der Kanonistik auf die europäische Rechtskultur 3: Straf- und Strafprozessrecht*, eds. Mathias Schmoeckel, Orazio Condorelli, and Franck Roumy, (Norm und Stuktur: Studien zum sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit) 37:3 (Cologne, 2012), pp. 427–55; H. Holzhauser, "Geständnis," in *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* 1 (Berlin 1971), cols. 1629–42, here at cols. 1631–37.

70 Aemilius Ludovicus Richter, ed., x 4.13.5 in *Corpus iuris canonici* 2 (Leipzig, 1839), col. 672: "*Non separatur matrimonium ad confessionem coniugum, qui dicunt affinitatem processisse, etiamsi rumor vicinia consentiat. Et est casus multum allegabilis et notabilis.*"

71 Dråpamålsbalken 1 (Chapter on Homicide) 11:1, Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, p. 243; Wessén, ed., *Söderköpings lagbok* 1387, 12, p. 104: "*Komber man til radzstuw oc ganger wither*

In Swedish legal practice, criminals soon to be executed formed one variation and extension of the deathbed testimony theme. Even for them, as Anu Lahtinen shows in her article in this volume, preparations for death were important even for convicted criminals who soon were to meet their Maker. Even they could attempt to perform a Good Death.<sup>72</sup> At one such instance, in the town of Stockholm, the wife of Nils Persson had acquitted him of all complicity to her unspecified crime both at the town court and on the site of execution. This was attested by the whole town council of Stockholm. The wife's steadfast denial of her husband's guilt cleared him of suspicion, and he was given a letter testifying this.<sup>73</sup>

In another case, the testimony of the confessed, convicted, and about-to-be executed murderer was also used for proving the guilt of his accomplice. Nils Ivarsson, the convicted killer of Hans of Götaryd, had confessed to the murder that he had committed together with and at the instigation of Hans's wife. When Nils was about to be decapitated for the murder, he was asked three times about the guilt of Hans' wife. The source stated that "he gave always the same speech." Even when a cloth was being tied over his eyes, he was asked about the truth in the matter. Nils declared himself ready to die for the fact that the truth was spoken in the matter and not the untruth.<sup>74</sup> In this instance, as Hans of Götaryd's wife was already dead, the case could not even potentially lead to trial and execution. Rather, it involved her body as she had been buried in the churchyard. As a result of Nils's pre-execution confession, the murder victim's body was buried in hallowed ground, while the corpse of his murderess was exhumed and the burial ground purified.

Nevertheless, some people were not convinced of the truthfulness of the testimonies of soon-to-be executed criminals. In the earliest commentary on the Town Law, the Swedish priest and Lutheran reformer Olaus Petri (1493/7–1552) noted that the rule of the Town Law about deathbed confession was a common

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*sak sinne. the han agher dööth fore lyuta. tha thorwo ther ey witne ower taghas. fore thy at swa mykit er kent sak. som skerskutath ellr mz witnum til bunden."*

72 The Lutheran Church taught that faith alone sufficed for salvation, and that according to Lutheran funeral sermons, as analysed by Otfried Czaika in this volume, practically nobody died unprepared for death in sixteenth-century Sweden. Yet, as observed in Riikka Miettinen's article in this volume, among ordinary people, the thought that a good death required preparations and the continuation of the late medieval *ars moriendi* tradition were remarkably resilient. This was so even among would-be suicides.

73 Almquist, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1544–1548*, 7 Oct. 1544, pp. 29–30.

74 Hedda Gunneng, ed., *Biskop Hans Brasks registratur: Textutgåva med inledning*, (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet, serie 1) 85 (Uppsala, 2003), 26 May 1523, nr. 65, pp. 156–57.

rule “on what happens on a man’s deathbed” (*j ens mans yttersta*).<sup>75</sup> Yet, he seems to have been somewhat sceptical about the relevance and authority of deathbed confessions. For some years, Olaus Petri had acted as the town scribe of Stockholm, and this experience may have made him distrust oaths and people’s fear for the salvation of their souls.<sup>76</sup> Martin Luther was also known to have criticised “gallows sorrow,” or the sorrow and resentment of the punishment of the crime and the imminent death that criminals felt. However, according to him, this did not amount to true contrition and sorrow for the crime, both being necessary for absolution.<sup>77</sup>

According to Olaus Petri, many “unchristian” people accused others on their deathbed in order to harm them without concern of the eternal perdition that would await them. He claimed that especially thieves and other criminals were likely to do this at their execution. This is why Olaus Petri advised not to believe what thieves said in their last moments about theft, traitors about treason, or adulterers about adultery. Indeed, nobody was to be allowed to act as witness in the crime they themselves were accused of.<sup>78</sup> Even if the court records of Stockholm do not demonstrate that Olaus Petri’s concerns were justified, such cautionary attitudes may still have been prevalent in the early seventeenth-century, as Johan Skytte (1577–1645), who had written the commentary on the Town Law, repeated it verbatim.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the practice persisted.

However, occasionally the about-to-be executed criminals could confess to other misdoings, as well. “In his last moments” and in the presence of “many honest men,” the nobleman Erik Puke (d. 1437), son of Nils Gustavsson [Rossviksätten], confessed that he had only rendered 70 marks of the 700 marks he was under obligation to pay Esbjörn Blåpanna for some lands he had bought

75 Olaus Petri, “Kommentar till stadslagen,” in Olavus Petri, *Samlade Skrifter* 4 (Uppsala 1917), pp. 315–46 at p. 330: “*Thetta capitlet plägar wara en almenneligh regla och rettilse om thet som skeer j ens mans yttersta, [...]*.”

76 On Olaus Petri, see Gunnar T. Westin, “Olavus Petri,” in *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon* [hereafter *SBL*], 28 (Stockholm, 1992–94), pp. 151–66.

77 Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 351–52.

78 Olaus Petri, “Kommentar till stadslagen,” p. 330: “*Men thet skulle stå medh beskedh, för ty thet hender offta, at monger ochristen menniskia thor seya j sitt yttersta på en annan, på thet hon kan komma honom j skadha, och är til fridz hon bliffuer ther ewinnerliga fördömd före, Huilkit besynnerliga skeep plägar aff tiuffuar och andra ogeringsmän, när the rettadhe bliffua, Therföre bör icke en tiuffwarda betrodd huadh han sägher om en annan j hans yttersta om tiuffuerij, Jcke en förrådhare om förrådherij, Jcke en hoorkarl om hoor, ty ingen bör wara betrodd at witna om en annan j then misgerning han sielff är beslaghen medh.*”

79 Emil Wolff, ed., *Riksrådet Johan Skyttes kommentar till stadslagen* (Gothenburg, 1905), pp. 125–26.

from the latter. Thus, Esbjörn and his descendants were allowed to redeem the properties for that sum. Even though the document mentions the death of Erik Puke only in a very nondescript way and in passing, he had actually been decapitated that same year in connection to the revolts in Sweden in the 1430s.<sup>80</sup> The nobleman Nils Sture (b. by 1427–94), Keeper of Västerås Castle, had heard the oral confession of Olof the Scribe as the latter was about to be decapitated in Skänninge. Olof had wrongly been claiming a sixty-mark sum from a man whom he then had had evicted from his landed estate as a result of non-payment. Based on this oral confession, Nils Sture forbade anyone from hindering the rightful owners of their possession and use of the farm.<sup>81</sup>

A variation of this theme was the practice in which, in cases of conflicting confessions, the attitude of the about-to-be executed determined his or her ultimate fate. In seventeenth-century cases of serious sexual crime, such as adultery, the threat of execution could exceptionally be used as a means of extorting the truth out of the suspects. When there were many indices of guilt, but one or both suspects steadfastly denied the deed, their ultimate fate was determined by the order of the Court of Appeal by asking them a final time whether they had committed the crime when their head was laid on the executioner's block. If one or both finally confessed to the deed just before their death at the execution site, that person was indeed executed. If the denial of guilt was as adamant as before, the person was set free. On certain occasions, this method could – and did – lead to the decapitation of one suspect on his or her own admission, while the other went scot-free.<sup>82</sup>

Deathbed testimonies of a kind were also used in some cases as evidence against an alleged partner-in-crime. A criminal prosecution against the priest Laurentius Hvit, accused of clerical incontinence and heard in the ecclesiastical forum in the early fifteenth century, used as evidence the words of Hvit's adulterous concubine Katarina, uttered while she gave birth to a stillborn baby and then died at the end of a difficult and protracted parturition. The two midwives (*mulieres obstitrices*) witnessed what they had heard Katarina confess when she was in labour on what was to become her deathbed (*in extremis*

80 Database of Swedish medieval charters (Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek över medeltidsbreven) [hereafter SDHK] at <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/SDHK> (last accessed 25 Aug. 2017), 14 Oct. 1437, doc. SDHK-nr: 22854. See also the image of the original document online: <http://www3.ra.se/sdhk/bild/22854.JPG>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017. On Puke, see Herman Schück, "Erik Puke," in *SBL* 29 (Stockholm, 1995–97), pp. 527–30.

81 5 March 1471, SDKH-nr. 29226, <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/SDHK>, last accessed 25 Aug. 2017. On Sture, see Gunnar T. Westin, "Nils Sture," in *SBL* 34 (Stockholm, 2013), pp. 91–93.

82 E.g. Rudolf Thunander, *Hovrätt i funktion: Göta hovrätt och brottmålen 1635–1699*, (Rättshistoriskt Bibliotek) 49 (Lund, 1993), pp. 99–101. See also *ibid.*, p. 102.



*suis in partu laborans*).<sup>83</sup> Before Katarina breathed her last the following day, shortly after the midwives had finally been able to extract the pieces of the long-dead fetus out of her body, she had confessed that the priest Laurentius, not her husband, had impregnated her.<sup>84</sup>

Later, early modern court records would suggest that it had become standard practice to grill women in labour to tell the name of the father of the child if sexual crime was suspected – especially in the case of unmarried women. This confession was then generally considered true even if the woman ultimately survived.<sup>85</sup> Even if the parturient had not been condemned to be executed, she was in terrible pain and feared for her life and possibly also for the life of the child. According to “A Consolation for Pregnant Women” (1564, *Enn Tröstbook för Haffuandhe Quinnor*), a work of Erik Falck (d. 1570), bishop of Linköping, all Christian women were to put their faith in God and Jesus during their painful labour and pray for mercy and pity. Falck admitted that some women died in childbirth, but that praying would still be “useful and beneficial for them” (*nyttigh och gagneligh*).<sup>86</sup> Yet, he maintained that God often helped when the parturient’s sorrow, anxiety, and pains were at their worst. “Yes, as if she was now going to death, but that does not take long, but soon takes a turn again towards joy.”<sup>87</sup> However, this supposedly required that she should be inclined to tell the truth about her partner in sexual crime under the circumstances.

A version of this thinking was at hand is when Malin Vilhelmsdotter, the wife of the Scottish-born tradesman Blasius Dundi (d. 1621), one of the wealthiest burghers in Stockholm, gave birth to a child. Malin Vilhelmsdotter had

83 “[F]atebatur in extremis suis; dixit [...] in extremis suis in partu laborans; mulier illa, que de partu ibidem moriebatur [...] diceret,” Silfverstolpe, ed., *SD II*, 5 June 1411, doc. 1426, p. 390. E.g. the Town Law of Visby expressly allowed honest matrons (*bederue vrowen*) to testify what was told of the parturient or the baby “within the three walls as no men could come there” (*binnen den ver wenden [...] wante dar nene man to comen. möghen*) 1:50 “on matrons who are in labour” (*van vrowen de in arbeit gan. enes kindes*), in Schlyter, ed., *Wisby Stadslag*, *CISGA*, 8, p. 46.

84 Silfverstolpe, ed., *SD II*, doc. 1426, 5 June 1411, pp. 390–91.

85 E.g. ULA, UDA, A 1 a:1, UDP, Sine dato, 77r; Almquist, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1568–1575*, 31 Oct. 1575, pp. 407–08; Ericsson, ed., *VST*, 30 Oct. 1594, p. 196; *ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1594, pp. 197–98; 4 Dec. 1594, p. 204.

86 Erik Falck, “Enn Tröstbook för Haffuandhe Quinnor,” in *Fem källor från den svenska reformations tiden i Finland*, ed. Terhi Kiiskinen, (Suomen historian lähteitä) 6 (Helsinki, 2010), pp. 298–345, here esp. pp. 308–15, quotation on pp. 325–26.

87 Erik Falck, “Enn Tröstbook för Haffuandhe Quinnor,” in Kiiskinen, ed., pp. 314–15: “Ja, lijka som hon nu gå schulle i sielffua dödhen, men thet warar dogh icke lenge, wthan wender sigh snarligha om igen till gledhe.”

been guilty of flirtation and indiscretion outside marriage, but she steadfastly denied any act of adultery. The priest Carl and her own mother had asked her close to the childbirth in the presence of other priests whether she had committed adultery.<sup>88</sup> Three hours before she gave birth to a child, she had drunk a glass of wine in a way amounting to a ritualistic curse and stated in front of witnesses: "God grant that I may drink my death with this glass – not only temporal death, but also the death of perpetual hell, if this child is sired by another than Blasius Dundee."<sup>89</sup> Also, "when her pains were at their worst," Malin Vilhelmsdotter's mother had said to her in the presence of the midwife and four other women: "Now I see that you are guilty." Malin had retorted: "If I am guilty or if I have known another man than Blasius, may God give that what I give birth to may look like a devil and not a human being, and that it may come out from the mouth and not where it should come."<sup>90</sup>

In medieval and early modern Europe, preparing for childbirth often very concretely meant preparing for death, and pregnant women sometimes made their will expressly in anticipation of delivery.<sup>91</sup> The increase of women's wills in the late medieval and early modern Europe may to some extent have reflected "women's more numerous encounters with the prospect of death because of pregnancy."<sup>92</sup> Moreover, it has been observed that confession "was normally tied to seasons and crises: to dangerous journeys, marriage and childbirth

88 Sleman, ed., *STb från år 1592* 3, 27 Oct. 1600, p. 124.

89 Sleman, ed., *STb från år 1592* 3, 3 Nov. 1600, p. 126: "Gudh gifue at iagh må dricka minn dödth vthi detta glaß icke allenest thenn timeliga, vthann och then ewiga hälwetes dödenn, om någenn annann hörer barnet till vthan Blasius Dundij."

90 Sleman, ed., *STb från år 1592* 3, 27 Oct. 1600, p. 124: "[o]m iagh ähr sköldigh eller wet vtaf någon mann mere ähnn Blasius, så Gudh gifue at thet iagh föder vtaf migh måtte wara licht et diäfwuls beläthe och icke människios, och at det måtte gå genom hannes mundh och icke der det bör gå vth."

91 On the anxiety, fear of death, and suffering at childbirth, see, e.g. Anu Lahtinen, "Kasvakoon lapsi kunniaksi vanhemmilleen ja seurakunnalleen": Aatelisen jälkikasvun odotusta 1500-luvulla," in *Lapsi matkalla maailmaan: Historiallisia ja kulttuurisia näkökulmia syntymään*, eds. Pasi Saarimäki, Kirsi-Maria Hytönen, and Heli Niskanen, (Historiallinen Arkisto) 135 (Helsinki, 2012), pp. 120–53, esp. at pp. 131–39; Lucinda McCray Beier, "The Good Death in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (London and New York, 1989), p. 52; Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*, (Anglo-Saxon Studies) 4 (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 94–96; Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Boston, 1991), esp. pp. 66–76 and 150–56; Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 21–31.

92 Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*, (Baltimore and London, 2000), pp. 141–42.

[, and] serious illness.”<sup>93</sup> Some mothers, like Elizabeth Joscelin (Jocelin, 1595/6–1622), prepared with forebodings for childbirth by writing advice for the unborn baby. Joscelin started to feel an “apprehension of danger that might preuent [her from] executing [the] care [...] in religious trayninge of [her] childe”. She felt doubly terrified, not only fearing the loss of her “littell one,” but also the painfulness of “that kinde of death.” She also “heartily desired to be religiously prepared to die.” These sentiments proved to have been justified as she died of a fever nine days after her daughter had been born.<sup>94</sup> Naturally, death of parturients was a relatively frequent phenomenon, and it has been estimated that, around 1650, about 200–300 women per 10,000 births died in childbirth in England.<sup>95</sup> These figures may be indicative for other European regions as well. Due to the genuine risks, the churching of mothers was partly perceived as thanksgiving for survival.<sup>96</sup> This probably also explains the power of the procedure even in court practice, and midwives were later given a semi-official position in reporting at court about the circumstances of the birth when sexual crime was suspected.<sup>97</sup>

Evidence from both normative sources and legal practice shows that deathbed confessions were used both in towns and in the countryside, in the Late Middle Ages as well as in the early modern period. The cases indicate a widespread use and perceived relevance of deathbed testimonies in several different variations in Sweden, both on the lower court level and in the courts of appeal. In fact, even the Swedish Law Commission of 1643 expressed its faith in confessions made “in the hour of death” (*å dödstima*).<sup>98</sup> Thus, these beliefs and practices were certainly well-embedded in the Swedish legal culture regardless of the official Lutheran doctrine discussed in Czaika’s article in this volume. But what was their origin?

### Deathbed Confessions in the *Ars moriendi* Literature

After investigating the norms and legal practice regarding deathbed confessions, it is time to place them in the religious context of the time in order to

93 Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 80.

94 E.g. Elizabeth Joscelin, *The Mothers Legacy to her Vnborn Childe*, ed. and intr. Jean LeDrew Metcalfe (Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 2000), pp. 3–5, quotations on pp. 46 and 53.

95 Irvine Loudon, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800–1950* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 158–60.

96 David Cressy, “Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England,” *Past & Present* 141 (1993), pp. 106–46, here pp. 115–19, 124–26, and 145.

97 For eighteenth-century practices, see, e.g. Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, *Ujostelemattomat: Kätilöiden, synnytyksen ja arjen historiaa* (Helsinki, 2012), pp. 140–41.

98 E.g. Thunander, *Hovrätt i funktion*, p. 99.

assess why they were given such authoritative status in the law. The Catholic doctrine of individual responsibility of sins and, consequently, the preparations of the soul for afterlife, influenced many areas of medieval life in a profound way. Before dying, a person was to arrange his/her worldly affairs and make amends for any sins and wrongdoings. At the deathbed, the prospect of eternal damnation was more imminent than ever as the dreaded Last Judgement and the weighing of the soul, so vividly presented in medieval imagery on the walls of many parish churches, were nigh.

The ideal religious preparations for death required the presence of family and friends as well as spiritual preparations: confession, absolution, and possibly also extreme unction. Priests were usually present at the deathbed, as the anointing of the sick or extreme unction is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Indeed, the most influential Swedish provincial law, the Law of Uppland (1296), agreed that administering the last rites for parishioners was a top priority among the duties of a parish priest.<sup>99</sup> Parishioners dying without the sacrament also topped the list of complaints the people of Somero compiled against their local priest, *dominus* Michael, for the neglect of his duties.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the priest usually played an important role in preparing the soul for death as confession, absolution, and the reception of the eucharist on the deathbed were much more central than extreme unction in some regions.<sup>101</sup> The duty of every Christian to make an annual confession before receiving the sacrament had become obligatory after the canon *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The confession of the penitent formed the basis of penance ordained by the confessor in the Church's spiritual forum of the care of souls (*cura animarum*). The Lateran Council of 1215 also emphasised the duty to instruct the local clergy in matters pertaining to the care of souls.<sup>102</sup> This gave more impetus to the growth of a whole library of penitential literature of handbooks for the confessor on how to handle the confessional and deal with the sinner as well as what penance to prescribe.

99 Kyrkobalken (Chapter on the Church) [hereafter Kk] 12, Upplandslagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 1:21. By contrast, the Law of East Gothia holds that baptizing an infant took precedence to a deathbed if a priest had to choose between the two, Kk 6, Östgötalagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 1:9.

100 Several parishioners were listed as "*obiit absque sacramentis*" or "*obiit absque sacramentis ecclesiae propter eius negligenciam*," Reinhold Hausen, ed., *Finlands medeltidsurkunder*, 5 (Helsinki, 1928), 9 Sept. 1492, doc. 4434, pp. 360–62, here p. 361.

101 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village 1294–1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (London, 1978), p. 313.

102 Antonius García y García, ed., *Constitutiones Concilii quarti Lateranensis una cum Commentariis glossatorum*, (Monumenta Iuris Canonici, series A: Corpus Glossatorum) 2 (Città del Vaticano, 1981), Canon 21, pp. 67–68.

The role of confession, penance, and restitution by the dying person, the *moriens*, on the deathbed was naturally stressed in late-medieval *ars moriendi* manuals on how to perform the good and religious death (*mors beata*). The *moriens* had to merit salvation and nobody could be assured a place in heaven. He or she also had to understand the matters necessary for his or her salvation. In addition, confession and contrition were required before the sacraments of the Church could be received.<sup>103</sup> Penitential manuals insisted on the restoration of illicitly acquired property or compensation for wrongs such as usury, robbery, plunder or deceitful commercial dealings, but even unintended damages to others. The family of the sinner was also under the same obligation of restoration if they were aware of the wrong.<sup>104</sup>

For example, in his *Die Hymelstrasz* (Road to Heaven) from 1465, the Austrian Augustine canon Stephan von Landskron (c. 1412–77) exhorted the dying to examine their conscience and make a full and contrite confession of all their sins in their entirety. If possible, a full restitution for any wrongs committed was also recommended, as restitution was usually a prerequisite for absolution. The best hope for salvation and the mercy of God was in a humble confession of one's sins. The author warned especially that no sins, especially mortal ones, were to be concealed from the confessor. The role of the priest at the deathbed was also to facilitate this. He was to list all the Seven Deadly Sins and Ten Commandments one by one and ask whether the dying had committed any such sin or broken any of the commandments.<sup>105</sup> Thus, confession was a paramount part of preparing for death.

This thought is also present in the Swedish *Ars moriendi*: *Johannis Gerson lærdom hwrw man skal læra dø til sjaelenne salichthet* (Engl. *Ars moriendi: Jean Gerson's teaching on how to learn to die to the salvation of the soul*). As the name suggests, the book printed in 1514 was a version of Jean Gerson's (1363–1429) *De arte moriendi*, originally part of his *Opusculum tripartitum de praeceptis decalogi, de confessione, de arte moriendi*. Its starting point was that once it was perceived that the illness was to lead to death, the confessor was immediately to be sent for to prescribe penance and absolve the dying person.<sup>106</sup>

103 Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi*, pp. 18–22.

104 Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 340–41.

105 Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, pp. 23–25.

106 *Gersons lærdom huru man skall dö: tryckt i Upsala 1514, fotografiskt återgifven*, (Samlingar utgifna af Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet) 24 (Stockholm, 1881), fol. Aiii: “Naar en mænniskia wardher siwk swa ath man præffwar ath then siwkdome dragher til dødhz tha skal man strax kalle til henne skriffte fadheren som hono skriffte ok afløse.”

Medieval manuals on visiting the sick mentioned that the afflicted person was to ask for the forgiveness of all wrongs committed by him or her towards others and be reconciled with adversaries.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, *ars moriendi* handbooks also insisted that the dying was to forgive those who had offended him or her for the sake of God and ask for the forgiveness of those he or she had offended.<sup>108</sup> The Swedish version of Gerson's *De arte moriendi* told the confessor to ask the dying whether he or she had offended someone by causing damage to their soul, "life, limbs or health" or reputation. The dying were also to be asked if they had done someone something that they would not wish to be done upon themselves – referring to Luke 6:31. The dying were exhorted to reconciliation and asking for forgiveness for God's sake.<sup>109</sup> The *moriens* was also to be asked their readiness to forgive "of all his or her heart all that had been done upon him or her and forgive everything completely for the sake and love of God and for His painful death and suffering."<sup>110</sup>

Accordingly, some priests took an active role at the sickbed or deathbed in attempting reconciliation. In post-Reformation Sweden, the Church Ordinance of 1571 regulating the priest's visit to the sick required that a sick person who sent for the priest and asked for the sacrament had to desist from sin and be penitent and conciliatory. If, by contrast, he or she wanted to persist in sin with "a hardness of heart," the priest was to deny the sacrament.<sup>111</sup> There are recorded instances, for example from Vadstena in 1600, that the priest refused to administer the sacrament at the sickbed, claiming not being able to do so

107 E.g. Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Skellefteå, 2008), pp. 145–46.

108 Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi*, pp. 18–22: "ut indulgeat suis offensoribus propter Deum et remitti petat ab his quos ipse offendit." For such perceptions in medieval Iceland, see Kírsi Kanerva's article in this volume.

109 Gersons lärdom huru man skall dö [1514], fol. Bij: "welth thw tik v naghra mattho brwsz-lighan wara mooth naghrom mænnisko ath thw haffwir naghrom skadhath til hans siele gagn heller til hans lifff eller lemer eller helbrygdo, eller til hans rykthe, eller om thw haffwir naghrom giorth teth thw ikke wille ath nagher skwlle göra tik." See also *ibid.*, fol. Bij<sup>v</sup>.

110 Gersons lärdom huru man skall dö [1514], fol. Bij<sup>v</sup>: "wilthw gerna forlata aff alle tyne hiertha alth thz tik ær giort y moth ok gifwa thz alth saman fwlæligha til for gwdz skwld ok kærlek Ok för hans hardha død ok pines skwld."

111 Ordning om the siukas besökning, Sven Kjällerström, ed., *Den svenska Kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning* (Lund, 1971), p. 133. See also more generally, Mia Korpiola, "Marriage-Counselling and Reconciliation in Marriage Cases in the Ecclesiastical Courts of Reformation Sweden," in *Mit Freundschaft oder mit Recht? Inner- und außergerichtliche Alternativen zur kontroversen Streitentscheidung im 15.–19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Albrecht Cordes with Anika Auer (Berlin, 2015), pp. 133–48.

“with a good conscience” as “great quarrel and discord” existed between the ailing man and his two nephews. After the two latter had been summoned, the priest started actively – and in the end successfully – to bring about reconciliation between the parties.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the local priest was called to witness the deathbed statement of the noble Tönne Eriksson (Tott) about the post-mortem division of his estate two days before him breathing his last. On his deathbed, Tönne forgave his wayward daughter Elin Tönnesdotter’s who had caused a scandal by an illicit love affair with a student. Because the father had been much offended by Elin’s behaviour, she would have lost her inheritance rights had her father not “given her his friendship again” (*gifwit henne wenskap igen*) and allowed her to inherit with her siblings.<sup>113</sup>

Even after the Reformation, it was perceived as important and expected behaviour for the salvation of one’s soul to arrange one’s affairs, reward people for their good deeds, and make reparation for bad actions. Thus, settling one’s affairs and making peace with the world both in the abstract and in particular cases were part of the prevalent culture of death, aided by the deathbed confessional practices.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, much of the medieval *ars moriendi* tradition was preserved after the Reformation in a modified form taking account of the new tenets emphasising faith and divine grace instead of deeds and intercession.<sup>115</sup>

112 Ericsson, ed., *VST*, appendix 1, 30 Dec. 1600, p. 445.

113 Riksarkivet (National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden), Svea Hovrätt, Huvudarkivet, Liber Causarum, E VI a 2 aa:53, Deposition of the priest Petrus Elai. See also Mia Korpiola, “The Fall and Restoration of Elin Tönnesdotter: Land, Noble Property Strategies and the Law in Early Seventeenth-Century Sweden,” *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anu Korhonen and K.P.L. Lowe, *COLLEGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (2007), pp. 153–79. Available online, [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/25757/002\\_09\\_korpiola.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/25757/002_09_korpiola.pdf?sequence=1), last accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

114 See also Anu Lahtinen, *Sopeutuvat, neuvottelevat, kapinalliset: Naiset toimijoina Flemingin sukupiirissa 1470–1620* (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 142 and 182–83.

115 E.g. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*; Volker Leppin, “Preparing for Death: From the Late mediaeval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon,” Claudia Resch, “Reforming Late Medieval *ars moriendi*: Changes and Compromises in Early Reformation Manuals for Use at the Deathbed,” Eivor Andersen Oftestad, “Let’s Kick the Devil in His Nose: The Introduction of a Lutheran Art of Dying in 16th-century Denmark-Norway,” and Luca Baschera, “Preparation for Death in Sixteenth-Century Zurich: Heinrich Bullinger and Otto Werdmüller” all in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jan Øygarden Flæten, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 27 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9–24, 153–72, 281–312, and 313–28. See also Eivor Andersen Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem *De Vita Hominis* in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark,” in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern*

In the medieval *ars moriendi* literature, the dying was to fight the diabolical temptations of thinking about worldly possessions or about family and friends unless his or her "spiritual sanity" (*spiritualis sanitas*), necessary for salvation, required it.<sup>116</sup> Yet, the deathbed continued to be perceived as a place to put things right and remedy old grievances, which could also be related to family circumstances. In some cases, this could involve marrying one's concubine or lover so that one did not die in a state of mortal sin – perhaps even legitimising one's natural children by doing so.<sup>117</sup> Occasionally, the lover was giving birth and because the labour was really difficult, she came so close to death that the man whose child she was carrying was induced to promise her marriage or betroth her out of pity or a wish to avoid legal consequences.<sup>118</sup> In a reverse case from 1571, Hans Gammal, mayor of Stockholm, who was on his sickbed (*vpå sin sottesengh lagh*), wanted to clear his wife of any suspicions of adultery that he himself had several years previously written about in a letter during a dispute with her. It seems he had also doubted his paternity of their son. Gammal wanted to ensure nobody would attempt to use his own words against his family after his death, and confessed in front of the priest, mayor, town secretary, and one town councillor on his deathbed that his wife was an honest woman and their son his legitimate son and heir. This came to be duly registered by the court.<sup>119</sup> Thereby, Hans Gammal had managed put his things right on his sickbed from which he seems never to have risen, and his family's rights were not denied after his passing.

Yet, these *ars moriendi* handbooks focused more on restoring unlawfully held property as they insisted that the dying was to render back anything he or she had stolen as was necessary if one wanted to ensure a place in heaven.<sup>120</sup> This was also mentioned in the Swedish version, which elaborated in more detail: "Dear N, if it is so that thou hast something of another man's property, mobile or immobile goods or money [obtained] by injustice and unlawfulness,

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Europe, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05\\_eivor\\_final\\_2.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05_eivor_final_2.pdf?sequence=1), last visited on 20 Apr. 2017, pp. 106–28.

116 Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi*, pp. 62–63.

117 E.g. Mia Korpiola, "The Deathbed Marriage of Karl Knutsson Bonde: Legitimation by Subsequent Marriage, Property and Family Strategies in Late Medieval Sweden," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 80 (2012), pp. 129–55.

118 E.g. VaLA (Landsarkivet i Vadstena), Linköpings domkapitels arkiv, A 1 a:1 Protokoll 1600–32, 19 Jan. 1609, fol. 39v; ULA, UDA, A 1 a:1, UDP, 30 Mar. 1593, fol. 1r.

119 Almquist, ed., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1568–1575*, 22 Mar. 1571, pp. 143–44.

120 Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi*, pp. 18–22: "ut indulgeat suis offensoribus propter Deum et remitti petat ab his quos ipse offendit. Quinto, ut ablata restituat."



are you ready to give it back to the rightful owner if you have it in your possession? Or to satisfy him with humble prayers or with promises, because such sins will not otherwise be forgiven.”<sup>121</sup> That such deathbed exhortations to return unjustly held property could be taken to heart can be seen in an example from about 1446. Olavus, vicar of Valö, had been at the deathbed (*in extremis*) of one Matthias of Ekeby, where the dying man had confessed to unlawfully withheld two farms from another clergyman.<sup>122</sup> Obviously, Olavus publicised this so that the property could be restored to its rightful owner.

Occasionally, priests were deliberately sent to the sickbed with a special mission – to extract a deathbed confession about certain property from the ailing person. For example, in 1576, the heirs of the late wife of the rich Stockholm merchant Jöns Andersson sent two priests to visit his sickbed, in order to elicit the truth in form of a deathbed confession regarding some disputed property. However, Jöns’s illness did not prove fatal, after all.<sup>123</sup> In cases where the illness was prolonged, it was recommended after this initial confession that the Ten Commandments be read and explained to the dying so that he or she could better understand whether he or she had to some extent broken any of them.<sup>124</sup> Then, an even more complete confession could be made so that the *moriens* could depart from the temporal world in peace with God as well as with his or her neighbours.

### The Legal Authority of Deathbed Confessions, Commercial, and Roman-canon Law

The importance of confession was already discussed in the previous subchapter. But why was the deathbed confession especially mentioned in law? I will

<sup>121</sup> *Gersons lärdom huru man skall dö* [1514], fols. Bij-Bijv: “Kære N. om Swa ær ath thw naghath haffwir aff snnars Mansz æghedeler Godz Løsth eller Fasth eller Pænningha medh oræth ok olagh æsthw redheboen latha thz koma ighen til rætthan egandhe, om thw haffwir thes macht, eller til ath fornøghia han mz ødmyka bøn, eller ok mz lyffth. Ty swa dane syndh giffs ekki annars til.”

<sup>122</sup> Database of Swedish medieval charters (Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek över medeltidsbreven) [hereafter SDHK] at <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/SDHK>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017, 1446, doc. SDHK-nr: 24917. See also the much-damaged original: <http://www3.ra.se/sdhk/bild/24917.JPG>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Birgitta Lager, “Lille Jöns Andersson, en storköpmän i 1500-talets Stockholm,” *Personhistorisk Tidskrift* 62 (1964), pp. 1–77, here pp. 61–62.

<sup>124</sup> *Gersons lærdom huru man skall dö* [1514], fol. Bvijv: “Tha ware ok goth wp rækna och wth tydha for honom tighe gwdz bodhordh oppo thz han maghe thes bæthre besinna sigh om han haffwir nageht giorth saa ath han ær y naghro mattho brwszlighe y thom.”

here further explore the possible influences that lay behind its adoption in law and legal practice.

To prove that a debt existed or that it had been paid was a recurring problem in commercial law, and, at the time, literacy and written documents were not yet that prevalent in the medieval Swedish society.<sup>125</sup> In Roman law, in *Novella* 90 (*De testibus*) of Justinian from the year 539, the question of proving the payment of debts had been expressly discussed. The law conveyed a strong preference of proving debts and their payment by written evidence because using witnesses in cases of debt payment had resulted in fraud, deception, and even in using impersonators. This had given occasion to a distrust of such evidence even amounting to a general prohibition of the testimony of witnesses in such cases. Nevertheless, the judge was allowed to accept such witness statements on certain conditions. The (male) witnesses had to be credible and trustworthy (*virī fide digni*). They also had to be present in order to witness the actual payment of the debt or to witness when the person who already had received payment confessed to that fact.<sup>126</sup>

The latter case would partly correspond to the conditions provided by King Magnus Eriksson's Town Law when the witnesses testified to hearing that the dying person had already received the property owed to him or her. However, it did not apply to the situation covered by the section in the law in which the creditor confessed to not having received any payment. Nor did it deal with the situation in which a person confessed to having paid a debt in full already and, thus, no longer owed some named person anything. All of these variants can be found in the legal practice in Sweden, but were not mentioned in this Roman legal passage.

As the question of dating the Town Law is uncertain, we cannot know whether the practice described in a Stockholm case from 1353 antedates or postdates the law. However, a case causing correspondence between the town council of Stockholm and their colleagues in Lübeck revolved around the issue whether or not Johan Berkhof had a lawful right to claim some property belonging to the late Johan vamme Steen. The Stockholm council explained that Berkhof's claim was lawful. Namely, two honest Stockholm burghers, Tidikinus Niger and Gerlach, son of Tidikinus the Minter (*monetarii*), had testified under

<sup>125</sup> On the development towards written record-keeping and literary practices in Swedish towns, see Inger Larsson, *Pragmatic Literacy and the Medieval Use of the Vernacular: The Swedish Example*, (Studies in Medieval Literacy) 16 (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 74–76.

<sup>126</sup> *Novella* 90.2 in Rudolfus Schoell and Gulielmus Kroll, eds., *Corpus iuris Civilis 3: Novellae*, 7th ed. (Berlin, 1959), pp. 447–48; Frank R. Herrmann, "The Establishment of a Rule Against Hearsay in Romano-Canonical Procedure," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 36 (1995), pp. 1–51, here pp. 19–20.

oath about what had taken place at Johan vamme Steen's deathbed, where they had been present. The dying man had still been sound of mind when he had admitted that he owed Johan Berkhof twenty-four Swedish marks, which he had entreated should be paid as soon as possible so that his soul would not be imperilled.<sup>127</sup>

The case gives rise to many questions regarding the role of deathbed testimonies. The practice of deathbed confession of debt may have been a custom traditionally followed in the town of Stockholm – and possibly in other towns in the Baltic Sea region, as well. Alternatively, in this case, the practice may have been codified into the town law if King Magnus Eriksson's Town Law, which contained the section, had already been enacted and was implemented in the case. It is also possible that the case and the practice followed this individual *ad hoc* case that came to inspire the Town Law of King Magnus Eriksson, for the precursor of the law, the *Björköarätten*, did not contain a similar section. The Lübeck burghers seemed not to have recognised the procedure, and indeed, my attempts to find a similar norm or traces of the practice in German town law have proven unsuccessful. There was a practice known in Hamburg from before 1270 that if a man who was on his deathbed sent for his creditors in order to make a reckoning with them, the creditor who failed to come without a legitimate reason would forfeit the debt.<sup>128</sup> However, this is still quite remote from witnessed statements *in extremis* regarding debt.

As written bonds and account books did not yet have the role they were later to have as evidence of debt in commercial relations, deathbed confession may have been a necessary practical solution if there was not much written proof on the debt. The Swedish *Björköarätt*, precursor of Magnus Eriksson's Town Law, relied on oaths and witnesses. Borrowing money and paying debts were supposed to take place with three witnesses present. However, if witnesses were not present, the person had to take an oath on the loan. In debts that were larger than three marks, but smaller than six, three oath-helpers had to confirm the oath of the principal, and for sums of six marks or more, the number of compurgators was doubled to six.<sup>129</sup> This is largely comparable with the contemporaneous Norwegian town law of King Magnus Hakonars-son (r. 1263–80) for Bergen, a major Hanseatic commercial centre. This law

127 Hildebrand, Tunberg, and Nygren, eds., *DS VI*, 30 May 1353, doc. 4920, p. 431: "*in extremis Johannis vamme Stene [...], dum adhuc compos bone esset mentis et rationis, audiuisse ab eius ore, quod ueraciter obligaretur [...]* Johanni Berkhof [...], *quam pecuniam sibi reddi et solui summopere exorabat, ne exinde anime sue periculum im(m)ineret.*"

128 Ebel, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des lübischen Rechts* 1, p. 70.

129 6, *Björköarätten*, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 5:454.

indicates that written contracts by no means prevailed in the Scandinavian trade at the time. Its chapter on trade presupposed that contracts were largely made with a handshake (*handzsalat*).<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, witnesses played an important role in proving various matters relating to commercial relations and circumstances at court.<sup>131</sup> Even for early modern England it has been observed that "[a]lthough wealthier, literate tradesmen used sealed instruments such as bills obligatory, or wrote transactions down, many bargains were only made orally in front of witnesses (involving even more members of the community in the transaction)."<sup>132</sup> Oaths and witnesses were also used in German town law, even if the reliance on oaths and oath-helpers was declining at the end of the Middle Ages, as witnesses to the debt and written documents were preferred.<sup>133</sup>

In addition, special oaths were used. In the Town Law of Visby, a dispute regarding money or goods (*geld oder gud*) could be settled at the last instance by an oath on relics. If a plaintiff sued another for money or goods, but the defendant countered by claiming to have paid or delivered the goods, this payment or delivery had to be proved by the defendant. Otherwise, the plaintiff could deny that he or she had received this and clinch it decisively by an oath on sacred relics.<sup>134</sup> A similar procedure was used in a Stockholm case from 1477, when Jens *wegare* swore on the relics that his grandfather (*forfader*) Niels *skomakare* did not owe Hanis Jensson anything. Jens also produced two compurgators to strengthen his oath.<sup>135</sup> In much the same way, in the 1590s, the veracity of the cargo lists of merchant vessels was confirmed by an oath. The lists and registers were put on top of a crucifix in accordance with old custom and the man in charge of the cargo put his two fingers on top of them and repeated the oath read aloud to him.<sup>136</sup>

130 Rudolf Meissner, ed., *Stadtrecht des Königs Magnus Hakonarsson für Bergen, Bruchstücke des Birkinselechts und Seefahrerrecht des Jónsbók*, (Germanenrechte, Neue Folge, Abteilung Nordgermanisches Recht) 3 (Weimar, 1950), Kaupabolkr, 4–5, pp. 200–01.

131 E.g. Meissner, ed., *Stadtrecht des Königs Magnus Hakonarsson*, Kaupabolkr, 4–5, pp. 200–01.

132 Craig Muldrew, "Interpreting the market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England," *Social History* 18:2 (1993), pp. 163–83, here p. 173.

133 Ebel, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des lübischen Rechts* 1, pp. 65–79, esp. pp. 76–77.

134 11:50, "if someone admits owing another something and says that he has already sent it" (*oft iemant deme anderen scult bisteit. vnde seghet dat he id eme ghesant hebbe*), Wisby Stadslag in Schlyter, ed., *CISGA*, 8, pp. 109–10.

135 Hildebrand and Almqvist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker* 1474–1520, 1:95 (7 May 1477).

136 Daniel Almqvist, ed., *STb från år 1592*, 1 (Stockholm, 1939), 20 Apr. 1594, p. 211.

These examples indicate that Swedish town law, like many others, relied on oaths with the added sacred presence of relics or crucifixes. Deathbed confession contained an extra dimension of sacrality as the approaching death was considered to induce people to be truthful instead of willingly plunging their souls into eternal perdition. Yet, it is worth stressing that deathbed confessions to debt did not disappear with the more widespread reliance on written documents and evidence. In fact, there are instances even from the later seventeenth century where courts referred to deathbed confessions as evidence of the existence and amount of debts.<sup>137</sup>

What about the possible influence of canon law through testamentary regulations? According to Katalin Szende, in later medieval Hungarian towns, wills were commonly made “on one’s sick- or deathbed,” and Stephen Epstein has stated of high medieval Genoa that “many, if not most, oral testaments were sickbed declarations.”<sup>138</sup> Indeed, this surely also applies to medieval Sweden, where wills were commonly made on the deathbed as elsewhere. There, later written documents were also made of such wills made at dying people’s deathbeds in the presence of a parish priest and/or other witnesses. Indeed, both ordinary written wills and oral deathbed wills in the presence of witnesses were a usual part of ordinary preparations for death in medieval Sweden.<sup>139</sup> Deathbed wills could be in favour of one’s relatives, as in 1350, when Lyder Ruska on his deathbed gave (*in exstremitate sui corporis laborans*) his sister’s son Nils Ruska and Nils’s other brothers a manor with all its chattels, a sum of money, a belt

137 E.g. some examples can be found through the search engine in Yrjö Kotivuori, *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852: Simon Sadenius*. Internet publication 2005, at <http://www.helsinki.fi/ylioppilasmatrikkeli/henkilo.php?id=3808>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017: “*Emedan Sahl: Abraham Torlinius på sin Sote Säng bekiendt sig wara skyldig till Studenten Simon Sadenium Tålf Dalr 16: ö: K.m:t för Præceptoris Löhn.*” See also Yrjö Kotivuori, *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852: Nils Grubb*. Internet publication 2005, at <http://www.helsinki.fi/ylioppilasmatrikkeli/henkilo.php?id=1371>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017: “*dhen Bekennelsen som Johan Hannsson j Wiwasteby, opå sijn Sotesäng förwekne den 12 Januarij giordt hadhe, om H: Nilses hemman dher uthi Wiwasteby.*”

138 Katalin Szende, “Testaments and Testimonies: Orality and Literacy in Composing Last Wills in Late Medieval Hungary,” in *Oral History of the Middle Ages: The Spoken Word in Context*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter, (Medium Aevum Quotidianum, Sonderband) 12 (Krems and Budapest, 2009), pp. 49–66, here p. 52; Epstein, *Wills and Wealth in Medieval Genoa*, p. 19.

139 Generally, see, Agnes A. Arnórsdóttir, “Dødslejet, sjælemesser og donationskultur i mid-delalderen,” in *Döden som katharsis: Nordiska perspektiv på dödens kultur- och mentalitetshistoria*, Yvonne Maria Werner, ed., (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis) 71 (Stockholm, 2004), pp. 65–88.

and a knife.<sup>140</sup> Or, such deathbed bequests could take place in favour of the Church and its various institutions, as in the case of Magnus Galle who gave a farm to the monastery of Nydala on his deathbed (*in extremis posito*).<sup>141</sup> It is also possible that the deathbed was the most common place for deciding where one wished to be buried.<sup>142</sup> For example, Lord Orestes Keldorsson (d. 1299) of the noble family Färila gave instructions about his burial place and his funeral on his deathbed (*in extremis agens*) as many witnesses came to testify.<sup>143</sup>

While the aristocracy often made their wills in writing, humbler people and town dwellers, still living in a more oral culture, were accustomed to later providing written evidence of what had been said at the deathbed. The witnesses then appeared before court to prove the existence of the will that they had heard spoken at the deathbed. As people were exhorted on the deathbed to make reparations to anyone they had wronged, such provisions also found their way to wills.<sup>144</sup> Also debts were occasionally mentioned in wills, usually stipulating that they were to be paid and possibly using specified property.<sup>145</sup> Occasionally, the creditor or debtor and the sum of money owed or owing were itemised. For example, Birger, son of Thomas of Hageby, specified his debts and creditors, like the debt to a merchant of Västerås who had Birger's silver cup as a pledge.<sup>146</sup>

140 Emil Hildebrand, Sven Tunberg, and Ernst Nygren, eds., *DS VI*, (Stockholm, 1878–1959), 6 Nov. 1350, doc. 4638, p. 235.

141 Ernst Nygren and Jan Liedgren, eds., *DS VIII*, (Stockholm, 1953–76), 1 Feb. 1356, doc. 7129, p. 251.

142 Joh. Gust. Liljegren, ed., *DS I*, (Stockholm, 1829), 26 July 1225, doc. 231, p. 241: "*concedimus locum sepulturae, ubi sibi providerint in extremis.*"

143 Joh. Gust. Liljegren, ed., *DS II*, (Stockholm, 1837), 22 Aug. 1299, doc. 1280, p. 296. For preparations for salvation in late-medieval and sixteenth-century Europe, see also the articles of Cindy Wood and Dominika Burdzy in this volume.

144 E.g. the will of Ingeborg Nilsdotter, Liljegren, ed., *DS II*, 2 June 1304, doc. 1428, p. 416: "*Item volo, quod debita mea, quecunque extiterint tempore mortis mee, solvantur integre de bonis mobilibus exstantibus in curijs meis, quando decessero. restitutiones eciam fieri volo integraliter de bonis eisdem, si probari poterit, me iniuste ab aliquo, quicquam habuisse, volens et quantum in me est inhibens [...].*" See also Liljegren, ed., *DS II*, 26 Jan. 1310, doc. 1650, p. 598: "*In primis disponimus et ordinamus, vt omnia ab ipso accepta et habita per quemcunque modum illicitum restitui et solui debeant de bonis suis vsque ad integram satisfactionem illis a quibus ipsum ea apparuerit habuisse. Pro hijs soluendis et restituendis omnia bona ipsius obnoxia et obligata esse volentes.*"

145 E.g. Liljegren, ed., *DS II*, 26 Jan. 1310, doc. 1650, p. 597: "*debita sua de bonis suis integre soluerentur.*"

146 Liljegren, ed., *DS II*, 23 May 1308, doc. 1583, pp. 530–31: "*Item hec omnia debita mea que diuersis reddere teneor videlicet erico sigwals son quatuor marcas den., Ecclesie thorshiergie*

While Roman law had accepted oral wills if made in the presence of seven witnesses, the medieval Catholic Church relaxed the number of witnesses necessary for a valid will. Oral wills were accepted by the Church, as it was very keen on guaranteeing that the last wishes, *ultima voluntas*, of the dying person be observed. In canon law, the Roman formalities on the number of witnesses for testaments were considered a mere product of human law. Thus, there was no obstacle to relax the strict formality based on the authorities of divine law, the Church Fathers, and the custom of the Church. According to Biblical authority (Matthew 18:16),<sup>147</sup> two or three witnesses were considered sufficient, and this was upheld by canon law.<sup>148</sup> For example, the influential law of the Hanseatic town of Lübeck accepted oral wills even if written ones were much more common: when a burgher was “on his last bed,” he dictated his last wishes to two town councillors, who reported back to the town council that then had the will recorded in the town’s official records.<sup>149</sup>

This testamentary practice was accepted also in Sweden. While written ceremonious Swedish wills usually contained the seals and names of a large number of witnesses, oral wills made by a person on his or her deathbed, however, could only be witnessed by two witnesses. For example, the Law of Uppland, by far the most influential provincial law of medieval Sweden, insisted on two domiciled men acting as witnesses to an oral will consisting of chattels.<sup>150</sup> Such is, e.g., the statement by the priest Elif Thoresson of Asby, who attended the deathbed of Jöns Knutsson of Tångby and, together with two local men, witnessed how the dying man willed property to the monastery of Vadstena. The statement stressed the orality of the will by noting that Elif and the witnesses

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*duas marcas den. Item cuidam mercatori arosie qui tenet ciffum meum argenteum in pignore duodecim horas olauo de halstum XIIII: (cim) marcas, theoderico in arosia VII horas solido minus, hennickino byttingi quinque marcas duabus oris minus de fructibus in sigwalstadhum prouenientibus [...].”*

147 Matthew 18:16 (Vulgate): “*Si autem te non audierit, adhibe tecum adhuc unum, vel duos, ut in ore duorum, vel trium testium stet omne verbum.*”

148 X 3.26.10–11: “*a divina lege et sanctorum Patrum institutis, et a generali ecclesiae consuetudine.*”

149 Wilhelm Ebel, *Bürgerliches Rechtsleben zur Hansezeit in Lübecker Ratsurteilen*, (Quellensammlung zur Kulturgeschichte) 4 (Göttingen, Frankfurt, and Berlin, 1954), pp. 32–33. For Hungarian towns, see Szende, “Testaments and Testimonies.”

150 Kk 14:1, Upplandslagen, in *SLL*, eds. Holmbäck and Wessén, 1:23. However, the parish clerk/bell-ringer was unable to witness such a will, and all legacies in immoveable property had to be made according to the formalities regulating the alienation of land – having 12–24 witnesses depending on the size of the land given.

were present and heard the testament in Jöns's "hour of death."<sup>151</sup> The shoemaker Jöns Andersson also referred to the witness statement of the three men who had been present when Jöns's wife had lain ill on her deathbed. They had heard when the couple had made a mutual oral will that the spouse who outlived the other would inherit a third of the property. The witnesses had heard Jöns's wife say this "from her living mouth" (*aff hennes leffuendes mwn*).<sup>152</sup>

Arguably, the role of deathbed confessions in Swedish law was a variation of the deathbed confession practice that was validated by the practices and formalities of making oral deathbed wills. This indicates some affinity with the English later medieval "deathbed transfers" that developed as a result of the canon law norms and practices of oral wills. Namely, in early fourteenth-century England, some customary tenants started to convey land through "deathbed transfers" that took place in the presence of witnesses with the tenant "on his deathbed" (*in mortali lecto*) or "languishing near his last" (*languens in extremis*).<sup>153</sup> Thus, the Roman-canon law of wills widely influenced secular legal practices.

As to the role of deathbed confessions and testimonies in Sweden, the spiritual preparations for a good death, in which the community and clerics also participated, also influenced secular law and customary practice. It may be, then, that the role of deathbed confessions in debt and financial cases were a part of a similar trend of the sacramental confession generally influencing commercial dealings and practices, as has been argued for e.g. the evolving culture of bookkeeping in late-medieval and early modern Europe. The metaphor of confession was also occasionally presented through commercial metaphors: the account given by the sinner at confession had to be as scrupulous and thorough as the accounts of the sinner-steward to the confessor-bailiff of the Lord. Minute and fastidious bookkeeping was considered virtuous, as the Day of Judgement could be juxtaposed with the "final audit" or reckoning, in which the closing accounts were checked and made and the unmoving creditor

151 Database of Swedish medieval charters, 8 Apr. 1433, SDHK-nr: 21930. See also the original document, <http://www3.ra.se/sdhk/bild/21930.JPG>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017: "*war iak næær ok pa hørde [...] gaf sit testament j sinom dødztima [...] thesse waro næær tha thz gafs ok ahördho.*"

152 Hildebrand and Almquist, eds., *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*, 4:56 (19 Apr. 1505).

153 L. Bonfield and L.R. Poos, "The Development of the Deathbed Transfer in Medieval English Manor Courts," *Cambridge Law Journal* 47 (1988), pp. 403–27, esp. pp. 412–20; Richard M. Smith, "Coping with Uncertainty: Women's Tenure of Customary Land in England c. 1370–1430," in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Jennifer Kermode (Stroud, 1991), pp. 43–67.



demanded interest.<sup>154</sup> A full and truthful account of one's sinful actions as well as property claims went hand in hand with the deathbed preparations of medieval and early modern men and women.

### Conclusion

As these examples show, deathbed confessions had a special status in Swedish law and legal practice in a variety of cases. They helped to decide guilt in homicide cases when the causal link between injuries and death remained unclear, and they also showed the attitude of the dying as the injured party (*målsägande*) and whether he or she thought the culprit was to be treated with leniency. Deathbed testimonies also helped to authoritatively confirm accounts as well as determine ownership, property rights, and the existence of possible debts. In addition, confessions of criminals about to be executed and women in the middle of the pains of childbirth – the former concretely and the latter potentially at death's door – also had special authority in determining paternity or suspected partnership in crime.

Generally in Europe, the religious preparations of the soul for death took it for granted that people were especially truthful and reliable at death's door and that they did not want to perjure themselves to hell, especially not at this crucial moment. In medieval and early modern culture, the deathbed was a place for settling scores, ending disputes, and bringing harmony. The ecclesiastical deathbed ideology and rituals made clerics into mediators, helping to induce confessions and put things right.

Åke Holmbäck and Johan Wessén have assumed that the special role of deathbed confessions was mentioned in the law because of ecclesiastical influence.<sup>155</sup> This seems plausible as oral deathbed wills and confessions in preparation for death provided the models for and formalities of authoritative deathbed statements. However, ecclesiastical influence alone does not explain why other European regions did not universally adopt a similar procedure in law, even if the religio-cultural background of deathbed confessions was pan-European. This being the case, one might assume that many other laws abroad, showing even stronger ecclesiastical influence, would contain similar notions. Why were deathbed confessions granted special status explicitly in Swedish law, but not in many neighbouring regions?

154 James Aho, *Confession and Bookkeeping: The Religious, Moral, and Rhetorical Roots of Modern Accounting* (Albany, 2005), pp. 1, 28–29, 35–40, and 54.

155 Footnote 75, Holmbäck and Wessén, eds., *MESL*, p. 86.

These other regions may have had a stronger literary culture relying on account books and written evidence such as IOUs and receipts, or alternatively, they may have used witness statements or oaths on relics as proof. They would not have needed a special norm on deathbed confessions in law. Compurgation and ordeals were generally classified as "irrational proof" whereas confession, eyewitnesses, and documentary evidence were "rational."<sup>156</sup> Even if the Romano-canonical law of evidence was developing into forbidding hearsay evidence, it never rejected evidence based on hearing (*ex auditu*) and on their own observations.<sup>157</sup> From the viewpoint of the learned doctrine of proof, the witnesses of deathbed scenes were reporting what they themselves had seen and heard the deceased say and do at his last. The legal practice seems to show that the three- or two-witness-rule of the law was followed. Two, three, or more witnesses were usually named and they testified under oath – on several occasions on some relics – about what the dying person had said. However, they had not witnessed the actual act of lending or of assault, nor were they experts assessing the causal chain between assault and death. Yet, the words of the dying person at the deathbed as reported by witnesses were very relevant for the initiation of a criminal process for homicide in a law court.

In a country like Sweden, where literary culture had not yet superseded the oral, and where wills were just as likely to be made orally at the deathbed as in writing, the legal weight given to deathbed confessions made sense. Even if written laws, records, and documents gained a more pronounced role in the fourteenth-century Swedish towns, many "lingering oral procedures," paraphrasing Inger Larsson,<sup>158</sup> in the law of evidence, such as compurgators, lived on until the end of the seventeenth century. It may well make sense to view deathbed confessions and testimonies as a mixture and extension of oaths, oath-helping, and confession, the prevailing means of proof in medieval Sweden.

In any case, the role of the deathbed confession may be interpreted as a sign of one of the strategies used for resolving difficult cases in default of any more decisive evidence. The witnesses told the court about what the injured party had claimed, without actually witnessing the deed themselves or without more tangible evidence. However, the special role of deathbed confessions in Swedish law seems to indicate the necessity of finding working solutions in difficult cases. In a peripheral country like Sweden, with only partial reception

156 Jean-Philippe Lévy, "L'Evolution de la preuve des origines à nos jours: Synthèse générale," in *La Preuve*, 2: *Moyen âge et temps moderne* (Brussels, 1965), pp. 10–11.

157 Herrmann, "The Establishment of a Rule Against Hearsay," pp. 35–50.

158 Larsson, *Pragmatic Literacy*, e.g. p. 149.

of the learned doctrine of evidence, matters like this were not resolved by witnesses, documentary or expert evidence, or by torturing the accused person. Mid-fourteenth century Sweden was still a “primarily oral society,”<sup>159</sup> and despite certain nascent doubts in the early modern period towards some features related to deathbed confession, the religious world-view that gave rise to the practice still stayed fundamentally the same. As Philippe Ariès has observed, “[t]he acts performed by the dying man, once he has been warned that his end is near, have a ceremonial, ritual quality.”<sup>160</sup>

In all its variations, the role of deathbed confessions in Swedish law and practice goes to show how important the preparations for death were for medieval and early modern people. Despite the Reformation and the Lutheran tenet that faith alone sufficed for salvation, the continuity of the mentalities is remarkable. Without making a full confession of the truth and making possible reparations, one was damned. This applied to debt, ownership, and possession of property at large as well as to guilt for homicide and other crimes. Thus, the medieval ecclesiastical doctrine and deathbed customs came to shape the actions of people to the extent that the practice also became written down and codified in law. The soul of the *moriens* was at stake, and while the individual acts were left to the dying person, the priest and the community acted as prompters, participants, and witnesses. The people in the examples presented in this article were not left alone on their deathbeds to await the Reaper. They may have performed and achieved a good death in the end, and there, their deathbed confessions helped them on the road to heaven and an eternal life.

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159 Larsson, *Pragmatic Literacy*, p. 148.

160 Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 18.

# The Concern for Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century

*Dominika Burdzy*

Nihil certius morte, nihil hora mortis incertius

ANSELMUS, *Meditationes*



## Introduction

The fear of death, not only of the expected one, but especially of the sudden and unexpected one, influenced people's attitudes and behaviour as they wanted to secure peace and salvation for the soul as well as remembrance after death. Moreover, the belief in the possibility of redemption and the redress of the wrongs committed in life by the souls suffering in purgatory, led to efforts to find people who would say their prayers and participate in masses for the dead.<sup>1</sup> The intercession of the living for the dead was a way to avert the

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<sup>1</sup> The historiography of this subject is too vast to deal with comprehensively here, though particular mention should be made of the basic: Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Memoria und Memorialüberlieferung im frühen Mittelalter," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976), pp. 70–95; Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Die Gegenwart der Toten," in *Death in the Middle Ages*, eds. Herman Braet and Werner Verbeke, (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia) 1/9 (Leuven, 1983), pp. 19–77; Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Die Gegenwart der Lebenden und der Toten: Gedanken über Memoria," in *Gedächtnis, das Gemeinschaft stiftet*, ed. Karl Schmidt (Munich and Zurich, 1985), pp. 74–107; Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Liturgische Memoria und historische Erinnerung: Zur Frage nach dem Gruppenbewußtsein und dem Wissen der eigenen Geschichte in den mittelalterlichen Gilden," in *Tradition als historische Kraft: Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters*, eds. Norbert Kramp and Joachim Wollasch (Berlin and New York, 1982), pp. 323–40; Karl Schmid and Joachim Wollasch, eds., *Memoria: Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter*, (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften) 48 (Munich, 1984); Pierre Chaunu, *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1978); Philippe Ariès, *Człowiek i śmierć*, trans. E. Bąkowska (Warsaw, 1989) [orig. *L'Homme devant la mort*, (Paris, 1977)]; Jacques Chiffolleau, *La compabilité de l'au-delà: les hommes, la mort et la religion*

threat of eternal damnation and was associated with the belief in the existence of purgatory where “those not entirely bad and not entirely good” could become purified through the penance and prayer of the living. The dead were sentenced to cleansing fire in order to atone for their sins and deserve paradise. Prayers and indulgences were to help them. Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) and Doctor of Church St. Isidore of Seville (560–636) were among the first to give advice on *purgatorium*, which was later developed by theologians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this study is to analyse the efforts taken to ensure salvation and remembrance after death by the inhabitants of the towns in Lesser Poland in the sixteenth century. The variety of commemorative forms was not a novelty at that time, on the contrary, it had already been characteristic of the medieval period. The sixteenth century was a period of economic prosperity for Polish cities, which was reflected in the level of wealth of the inhabitants and their foundations. Lesser Poland consisted of three regions: the provinces of Krakow, Sandomierz, and Lublin. Two of them, Krakow and Sandomierz, were rich in natural resources which were rarely found in other parts of the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Among the minerals mined on a large scale were

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*dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age (Vers 1320-vers 1480)* (Rome, 2011); Arnold Angenendt, “Donationes pro anima: Gift and Countergift in the Early Medieval Liturgy,” in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Aldershot and Burlington, Vt., 2008), pp. 131–54; Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld, “The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach,” in *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context*, eds. Esther Cohen and Mayke B. de Jong (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 2001), pp. 123–56; Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld, *Do Ut Des: Gift Giving, Memoria, and Conflict Management in the Medieval Low Countries* (Hilversum, 2007); Philippe Jobert, *La notion de donation: Convergences: 630–750*, (Publications de l'Université de Dijon) 49 (Paris, 1977); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago and London, 1998); Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 301–76.

- 2 Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance de Purgatoire* (Paris, 1981); Ariès, *Człowiek*, pp. 154–56; Stanisław Bylina, “Le probleme du Purgatoire en Europe Centrale et Orientale au bas Moyen Age,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, eds. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen, (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia) 1:15 (Leuven, 1988), pp. 473–80; Stanisław Bylina, “Czyściec u schyłku średniowiecza,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 90 (1983), pp. 729–44; Stanisław Bylina, *Człowiek i zaświaty: Wizje kar pośmiertnych w Polsce średniowiecznej* (Warsaw, 1992).

iron, lead, silver, copper, and lapis lazuli ores as well as marble and sandstone used in construction and decoration.<sup>3</sup>

The industrial and mining nature of towns was reflected, among others, in the sepulchral art and the amount of legacies to Church institutions. Some of the towns reached their prosperity through national and international trade brokerage as well as participation in the rafting of grain to Gdansk. The boundaries of Lesser Poland coincided largely with the borders of the diocese of Krakow, the richest and one of the largest dioceses in Poland. Krakow was the capital of Lesser Poland and also the capital of Poland until the early seventeenth century. It seems reasonable, therefore, to examine how the inhabitants of Lesser Poland differed in their commemorative practices from the inhabitants of other parts of the country.

### Preparing for Death in the Light of Wills

One of the main sources for this study are wills<sup>4</sup> in which testators left records *ad pias causas* and instructions for the executors of the will how to fulfill their

- 3 Antonina Keckowa, *Żupy krakowskie w XVI–XVIII wieku (do 1772 roku)* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Krakow, 1968); Feliks Kiryk and Ryszard Kołodziejczyk, eds., *Dzieje Olkusza i regionu olkuskiego*, 1 (Warsaw and Krakow, 1978); Jacek Wijaczka ed., *Dzieje regionu świętokrzyskiego od X do końca XVIII wieku* (Warsaw and Kielce, 2004); Zenon Guldon, "Chęcińskie górnictwo i hutnictwo kruszcowe w XV–XVIII wieku: Baza surowcowa i stan badań," *Studia Kieleckie* 1 (1979); Jadwiga Muszyńska, "Górnictwo i hutnictwo w dobrach biskupów krakowskich w województwie sandomierskim w połowie XVII w.," in *Pamiętnik Świętokrzyski: Studia z dziejów kultury chrześcijańskiej*, eds. Longin Kaczanowski, Adam Massalski, Daniel Olszewski, and Jerzy Szczepański (Kielce, 1991), pp. 147–64.
- 4 Waldemar Kowalski, "Eschatologiczne poglądy mieszkańców Krakowa doby reformacji," *Nasza Przeszość* 109 (2008), pp. 5–35; Katarzyna Justyniarska-Chojak, *Testamenty i inwentarze pośmiertne z ksiąg miejskich województwa sandomierskiego (XVI–XVIII wiek)* (Kielce, 2010); "Wszyscy śmiertelni jesteśmy i dlatego rozrządzamy majątki swoje": *Wybór testamentów z ksiąg miejskich województwa sandomierskiego (XVI–XVIII wiek)*, ed. Katarzyna Justyniarska-Chojak (Kielce, 2014); Mariusz Lubczyński, Jacek Pielas, and Henryk Suchojad, eds., *Cui contingit nasci, restat mori: Wybór testamentów staropolskich z województwa sanomiernskiego* (Warsaw, 2005); Jakub Wysmulek, *Testamenty mieszczan krakowskich (XIV–XV wiek)* (Warsaw, 2015); Bożena Popiołek, *Woli mojej ostatniej testament ten ... : Testamenty staropolskie jako źródło do historii mentalności XVII i XVIII wieku* (Krakow, 2009); Małgorzata Aleksandrowicz-Szmulikowska, *Radziwiłłówny w świetle swoich testamentów: Przyczynek do badań mentalności magnackiej XVI–XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1995); Alicja Falniowska-Gradowska, *Testamenty szlachty krakowskiej XVII–XVIII w.: Wybór tekstów źródłowych z lat 1650–1799* (Krakow,

last wishes.<sup>5</sup> Testators bequeathed money as well as movable and immovable property for churches or church-related institutions, such as religious fraternities, schools, hospitals (asylums for the poor), or colleges for diocesan clergy or orders.<sup>6</sup> The donated money was usually allocated in *wyderkauf*,<sup>7</sup> so that the debtor was required to pay an annual *wyderkauf* rent. Such bequests were either supposed to secure anniversary Masses or other services for the deceased or were devoted to foundation and retrofit of the above institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Wills played another important role at the time; not only were they legal but also religious acts,<sup>9</sup> and therefore they are a unique source to study the eschatological views of the contemporary society. The preamble of the will pointed to the futility and fragility of human life, inevitability of death, helplessness in the face of the approaching end of earthly life, which was frequently summarised in the sentence quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "Nothing is more certain than death and nothing more uncertain than its hour." The statements were accompanied by assurances of confidence in the power of God's mercy and entrustment of the soul in His hands (*In primis Animam suam in manus Dei Omnipotentis commendavit*<sup>10</sup>). They emphasised the salvific role of the passion and death of Christ, through which the dying could redeem their sins. Less frequently, they asked for the intercession of Mary and the Saints. Some testators declared their commitment to the Catholic Church whose faith

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1997); Małgorzata Borkowska, *Dekret w niebieskim ferowany parlamencie: Wybór testamentów z XVII–XVIII wieku* (Kraków, 1984).

- 5 Elżbieta Piwowarczyk, *Legaty testamentowe „ad pias causa” w XV-wiecznym Krakowie: Z badań nad pobożnością miejską* (Kraków, 2010). For comparison, see Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 102–07.
- 6 For comparison, see John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Chicago, 1997), pp. 168–95.
- 7 *Wyderkauf* (*wyderkaf*) was a common name for the purchase of annuity, known since the thirteenth century. The owner of money ("the principal amount") lent it to the debtor in exchange for a certain annual rent, called *wyderkauf*. The debt was secured on debtor's immovable property. The obligation to pay the rent ceased the moment the debt was paid off. In 1635, the *Sejm* (parliament) passed a law under which real estate could be charged with *wyderkauf* to a maximum of half of its value, while the rent could not exceed 7 per cent per annum, Bogdan Lesiński, *Kupno renty w średniowiecznej Polsce na tle ówczesnej doktryny i praktyki zachodnioeuropejskiej* (Poznań, 1966); Stanisław Russocki, "Wyderkaf," in *Encyklopedia historii gospodarczej Polski do 1945 roku* (Warsaw, 1981), p. 525.
- 8 Dominika Burdzy, *Szesnastowieczny Sandomierz – Kościół i miasto* (Kielce, 2012), pp. 286–88 and 294–97.
- 9 Ariès, *Człowiek*, p. 189.
- 10 Justyniarska-Chojak, "Wszyscy śmiertelni jesteśmy," p. 30.

was “true, holy, universal, Christian” and stemmed from “the apostolic provisions and rite of the universal Church.”<sup>11</sup> Very rarely there is information about the reception of sacraments (confession, Holy Communion, and last rites). In many wills, the executors were asked to pay off debts and repair harms so that they would not pollute bitterly the act of forgiveness, believing that it would provide peace of the soul after death.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that eschatological issues very rarely appear in testamentary regulations from small towns, as opposed to big cities.

Protestant wills differed from the Catholic in the rejection of the intercession of Mary and the Saints, the belief in salvation through the passion of Christ, as well as recommendations for a modest funeral and exhortations addressed to relatives who should live according to the principles of faith. Some testators quoted the *Confessio Sandomiriensis*, the confession of faith proclaimed in 1570, in Sandomierz, which represented an agreement between the Polish Calvinists, Lutherans, and Czech brothers (for example, the wills of Krakow burghers Krzysztof Trety and Jerzy Pernus).<sup>13</sup>

### Masses and Prayers for the Dead

According to their financial capability, the townspeople, as well as the urban clergy, nobility, and even the peasants and foreigners tried to ensure commemoration and prayers after death, believing that they would help them to gain eternal life. In their last wills, the wealthy bequeathed money for anniversary masses (celebrated on the anniversary of the death and preceded by the eve mass) or *trycezyny* (30 Gregorian masses celebrated for 30 consecutive days in the intention of the deceased). The poorer tried to pay for at least one or a few masses for the redemption of their soul or the souls of their loved ones. A large number of mourning masses was common in Lesser Poland, as it was across the whole of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Western Europe. This kind of mass was considered particularly important, which influenced their number; hence they were often celebrated by clergy from several churches. Philippe Ariès cites examples of ordering 100 and 1,000 masses (*Requiem* in honour of the divine persons or Marian feasts).<sup>14</sup> The most common commemorative practice were the aforementioned anniversary masses celebrated

11 Kowalski, “Eschatologiczne poglądy,” p. 16.

12 Justyniarska-Chojak, *Testamenty*, pp. 250–51.

13 Kowalski, “Eschatologiczne poglądy,” pp. 14–16 and 32–33.

14 Ariès, *Człowiek*, pp. 174–76.



on the anniversary of death or burial of the deceased. An anniversary mass consisted of the eve mass, celebrated the day before the actual anniversary, and the *Requiem* mass on the day of one's death. The service known as *Vigiliae Mortuorum* or *Vigiliae Defunctorum* included nine readings from the Book of Job (parts of Chapters 7, 10, 13, 14, 17, and 19) alternating with parts of the Penitential Psalms.<sup>15</sup>

In Krakow, the capital city, there were many diocesan and religious temples. The most important was the Wawel Cathedral which was the place of coronation of Polish kings and the national mausoleum. It was also the shrine of St. Stanislaus (1030–79), Bishop and Martyr, patron saint of Poland, hence legacies combined with the obligation to celebrate anniversary masses were mainly the domain of kings, archbishops, bishops, higher clergy of the Chapter, and magnates.<sup>16</sup> These legacies, linked with the obligation to celebrate masses, were a sign of prestige and financial position of the testators as only few had the privilege of celebrating masses for their soul in this very temple. On the other hand, the burghers of Krakow, municipalities and guilds were closely linked to the urban parish church of St. Mary, hence their legacies were mostly devoted to that church. This temple is referred to in the literature as the bourgeois "cathedral."<sup>17</sup> Although it never officially held such a dignity, it gained this name because of the role that it played among the townspeople. Both burghers and the nobility passed testamentary bequests for the numerous religious orders.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, while the parish of St. Peter located within the city walls was the most important temple for the townspeople in Sandomierz, the church and the hospital of the Holy Spirit de Saxia received the largest number of legacies

15 *Liber Horarum Canoniarum secundum veram rubricam sive notulam Ecclesiae Cracoviensis* (Krakow, 1508), pp. 211–14; Hieronim Powodowski, *Agenda seu ritus caeremoniarum ecclesiasticarum*, (Krakow, 1605), p. 160; Lucius Ferraris, *Prompta bibliotheca canonica, iuridica, moralis, theologica nec non ascetica, polemica, rubricistica, historica*, 1 (Paris, 1858), pp. 495–502; Jan Decyk, *Ludzki i Boży wymiar śmierci w świetle kultu zmarłych: Studium liturgiczne* (Warsaw, 2000), pp. 53–66; Alfons Labudda, *Liturgia pogrzebu w Polsce do wydania rytuału piotrkowskiego (1631)* (Warsaw, 1983).

16 Bolesław Kumor, *Dzieje diecezji krakowskiej do roku 1795*, 1 (Krakow, 1998), pp. 335–57; Elżbieta Piwowarczyk and Przemysław Tyszka, "Przyczynę do pobożności mieszczan krakowskich na podstawie xv-wiecznych legatów w 'Liber testamentorum' (rkps 772)," *Nasza Przyszłość* 105 (2006), pp. 7–42.

17 Elżbieta Piwowarczyk, "Miejszczańska 'katedra': Patronat nad kościołem mariackim w średniowieczu," *Nasza Przyszłość* 29 (2002), pp. 48–55.

18 Elżbieta Piwowarczyk, "Pobożne legaty jako źródło dochodu klasztoru bernardynów w Krakowie w latach 1453–1530," in *Klasztor w gospodarce średniowiecznej i nowożytnej*, ed. Marek Derwich (Wrocław, 2013), pp. 209–28.

in the sixteenth century. This must have resulted from the desire to fulfill the Christian injunction of charity towards the poorest and those most in need, according to the words of one of the eight beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." In case of the collegiate of the Virgin Mary, testamentary legacies came mostly from the kings, the nobility, and the clergy. Due to their social position, the *ad pia opera* bequests were much higher than those offered by the townspeople for the hospital, the parish church, or the two Dominican convents.<sup>19</sup>

In Nowy Sącz, the first place among the recipients of legacies belonged to the Franciscan monastery, and next came the St. Margaret's parish church and the Church of the Holy Spirit. The smaller temples located in the suburbs were not among the major recipients.<sup>20</sup>

### Foundations of Ecclesiastical Benefices

A lot of important information regarding the concern for the salvation comes from foundation acts of altars, chapels, temples, and various institutions under the care of the Church. Altars were simple benefices where priests (altarists) were obliged to celebrate a number of foundation masses.<sup>21</sup> In exchange for

19 Burdzy, *Szesnastowieczny Sandomierz*, pp. 345–46.

20 Katarzyna Justyniarska-Chojak, "Bacząc się byc podległą śmierci jako i inszy sąsiedzi ... – tożsamość religijna mieszkańców Nowego Sącza (w świetle testamentów z I ćwierćwiecza XVII wieku)," *Świat i Słowo* 19/2 (2012), p. 136.

21 Henryk Samsonowicz, "Ideologia mieszczańska w Polsce XIII wieku," in *Sztuka i ideologia XIII wieku*, ed. Piotr Skubiszewski (Wrocław, Warsaw, Krakow, and Gdansk, 1974), pp. 153–64; Eugeniusz Wiśniowski, "Parish Clergy in Medieval Poland," in *The Christian Community of Medieval Poland: Antologies*, ed. Jerzy Kłoczowski (Wrocław and Warsaw, 1981), pp. 132–33; Łukasz Walczy, "Uposażenie kościoła parafialnego św. Klemensa w Wieliczce do 1772 roku (altarie)," *Studia i Materiały do dziejów Żup Solnych w Polsce* 18 (1994), pp. 53–99; Łukasz Walczy, "Uposażenie kościoła parafialnego św. Klemensa w Wieliczce do 1772 roku (proboszczowie, kolegium wikariuszy, kaznodzieje farni)," *Studia i Materiały do dziejów Żup Solnych w Polsce* 17 (1993), pp. 106–12; Piwowarczyk, *Mieszczańska „katedra”*, pp. 34–35; Piwowarczyk, *Dzieje*, pp. 137–204; Franciszek Leśniak, "Duchowni i mieszczanie w Krośnie w XVI i pierwszych dziesięcioleciach XVII wieku," in *Krosno: Studia z dziejów miasta i regionu*, 4, ed. F. Leśniak (Krosno, 2002), pp. 13–14; Jarosław R. Marczewski, *Duszpasterska działalność Kościoła w średniowiecznym Lublinie* (Lublin, 2002), pp. 194–209. For comparison, see Zdeňka Hledíková, "Charakter i przejawy religijności mieszczaństwa praskiego na przełomie XIV i XV wieku," in *Ecclesia et civitas: Kościół i życie religijne w mieście średniowiecznym*, eds. H. Manikowska and H. Zaremska (Warsaw, 2002), pp. 301–03 and 305; Zbigniew Zyglewski, "Religijność w miastach kujawskich późnego

the transferred assets, the testator obliged the priest to celebrate a certain number of masses a week, according to a specific sacramental form. Usually there was one mass in honour of the mystery of God, the blessed Virgin Mary or a saint, and another, the so-called mourning mass (*zaduszna*, *Requiem*), for the late founder, for his redemption and liberation of his soul from purgatory. Sometimes the priest was also obliged to a service on the eve of every Dry Day. Some of these so-called altarists were obliged to celebrate a bigger number of masses, one of which was always for the deceased and often for his family, as was the case in the churches in Krakow, Wieliczka, Sandomierz, and Lublin. Some of the altars were linked to so-called "predicatories" (*predykatury*), i.e., benefices which obliged the priest to preach on specific dates, for the preachers. This way, testators also assured regular preaching and teaching of the catechism for urban communities (Sandomierz, Lublin, and Wieliczka). Interestingly, the preacher in Wieliczka was obliged to encourage the faithful in his every Sunday sermon to pray for the deceased founder.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that the main reason for founding altars was to ensure prayers and commemoration by the living up till the end of the world ("eternally"). However, creating a financial basis for a Church benefice was also an opportunity for the townsmen to emphasise their position within the municipal community and was a visible sign of their prestige. It also ensured a career within the Church for their children. The right of patronage remained, usually until death, in the hands of the founder, and then was passed to the municipality, which was typical in Poland in the sixteenth century.

A very interesting phenomenon can be observed in this period when altars and chapels, although having their patron saints, were commonly named after their founders. For example, in the Cathedral of Krakow there were: the Chapel of the Presentation of the blessed Virgin Mary called the Szafraniec chapel, the Chapel of Saint Thomas Becket of Canterbury (c.1118–70) called the chapel of Bishop Piotr Tomicki (1464–1535), and the chapel of the Birth of the Virgin called the Chapel of King Stephen Báthory (Pol. Stefan Batory, r. 1576–86). In Sandomierz, in the parish church of St. Peter there were: the altar of the St. Cross and Corpus Christi called the Brozmanowska altar and the altar of St. Michael called Sigismund's altar.<sup>23</sup>

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średniowiecza," in *ibid.*, pp. 332–33; Piotr Oliński, "Mieszczanin w trosce o zbawienie: Uwagi o memoratywnych funkcjach fundacji mieszczańskich w wielkich miastach pruskich," in *ibid.*, pp. 353–58; Gordon and Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead*, p. 33.

22 Walczy, "Uposażenie (altarie)," pp. 84–86; Walczy, "Uposażenie (proboszczowie, kolegium wikariuszy, kaznodzieje farni)," p. 107; Marczewski, *Duszpasterska działalność*, pp. 303–04; Burdzy, *Szesnastowieczny Sandomierz*, pp. 301, 311, and 348.

23 Kumor, *Dzieje*, pp. 299–329; Burdzy, *Szesnastowieczny Sandomierz*, pp. 183–91.

Chapels not only had an oratorian but also a sepulchral function as they were places of burial of their founders and their families. For this reason, they became mausoleums of noble or bourgeois families, having an additional representative function.<sup>24</sup> Testators also tried to equip them with works of art, liturgical vestments, and utensils for mass. In case of the bourgeois, this phenomenon is referred to as a kind of ennoblement of citizens through the arts. These chapels contained altars at which priests celebrated a number of memorial masses and in honour of the saints.

### The Care for the Dead in the Guilds of Artisans

Altars were also founded by guilds<sup>25</sup> which endowed the priest and obliged him to celebrate the so-called *żałomsze* (mournful masses), that is masses for the dead members of the guild, celebrated four times a year on dry days. Dry days are quarterly periods of fasting celebrated in the Catholic Church according to the liturgical calendar. They included Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday at the beginning of Lent, after the Sunday of Pentecost, after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and after the remembrance of Saint Lucy. The fasting in this period was to compensate God for the sins committed during the quarter. The commemorative responsibilities towards the dead were clearly defined in the statutes of those guilds. There was a strong emphasis on the presence of all craftsmen, craftmasters, and apprentices both during the funeral as well as during commemorative services. If a member of the guild was absent, late, or left the church before the end of the service, he was punished with a fine or had to provide some good for the altar guild or the parish church (usually a certain amount of wax). Some guilds appointed a deputy who informed everybody about all celebrations by handing them the guild sign (which was taken back after the ceremony).<sup>26</sup> The possession of an altar in a temple raised the prestige of the guild and influenced the hierarchy of all active professional

24 Piwowarczyk, *Mieszczańska „katedra,”* p. 48; Burdzy, *Szesnastowieczny Sandomierz*, pp. 304–05 and 314.

25 About the responsibilities of the guilds to deceased members see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 141–54; Hana Pátkova, *Bratrství ke cti Boží: Poznámky ke kulturní činnosti bratrstev a cechů ve středověkých Čechách* (Prague, 2000), pp. 50–61.

26 Hanna Zaremska, “Żywi wobec zmarłych. Brackie i cechowe pogrzeby w Krakowie w XV w. – pierwszej połowie XVI w.,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 81 (1974), pp. 733–48; Marcin Gadocha, “Cech piwowarów, karczmarzy i słodowników krakowskich w XVI i XVII wieku,” in *Miasta polskie w średniowieczu i czasach nowożytnych*, ed. P. Gołdyn (Krakow, 2008), p. 276.

corporations. A less numerous guild with an altar could be more important than a large corporation which did not possess one.<sup>27</sup>

Such altars were often called by the name of their craft and not their patron saint, which was common in the cities of Lesser Poland and in the whole of the Republic. The sources inform about altars such as the furriers' altar, tailors' altar, blacksmiths' altar, and goldsmiths' altar. In Wieliczka, due to the specific nature of this city, the parish church contained a "digging" altar which was under the care of "diggers," that is, the salt miners. In addition, there was also a saltworks' altar, which was looked after by *żupnik*, the manager of the salt mine in Bochnia and Wieliczka on behalf of the King. There was also the *bachmistrz* altar of St. Peter and Paul, associated with the office of *bergmeister*, an official who supervised the work carried out in the mine and watched over the appropriate protection of tunnels and shafts. The guild of salt refiners took care of the altar of the presentation of the blessed Virgin Mary called refiners' altar (*warzyczów/warzelników*). The priests serving at the altar were obliged to celebrate mourning masses for the dead miners, refiners and officials working in the mines and for their families.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in Olkusz, the main center for lead and silver mining, the brotherhood of diggers (miners) also looked after their own altar in the local Augustinian church. However, for the parish church of St. Andrew they founded a lead font and a 1.5-meter-tall silver cross.<sup>29</sup>

### The Role of Religious Confraternities in Commemoration of the Dead

An institutionalised form of the commemoration of the dead was registering them into religious brotherhoods. The books which contain the lists of the deceased members also record their families. When a confrere died, either a sign of the cross was put by his name or the word *mortuus* or *defunctus* was written next to it. Interestingly, the brotherhood of the blessed Virgin Mary at the Church of St. Mary in Krakow had a separate book, in which not only were the dead confreres recorded but also the kings of Poland: Casimir III the Great (r. 1333–70), Alexander Jagiellon (r. 1492–1506), and Sigismund I the Old (r. 1506–48). The book was prepared for purely practical reasons, to make it

27 Przemysław H. Dorszewski, "Cechy rzemieślnicze miast warmińskich w XVI i XVII wieku," in *Miasta polskie w średniowieczu i czasach nowożytnych*, ed. P. Gołdyn (Krakow, 2008), p. 250.

28 Walczy, "Uposażenie (altarie)," pp. 55–67, 70–72, and 75–77.

29 Danuta Molenda, "Dzieje Olkusza do 1795 roku," in *Dzieje Olkusza i regionu olkuskiego*, 1, eds. F. Kiryk and R. Kołodziejczyk (Warsaw and Krakow, 1978), pp. 196, 258, and 260.

easier to read the list of the dead during commemorative services. It includes the lists from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Each brotherhood had designated days to celebrate services *pro defunctis*. The *żałomsze* (mourning masses) celebrated quarterly on Dry Days were important points in the statutes of guilds.<sup>31</sup> The service was often connected with a fraternal procession, when the members were dressed in appropriate costumes (tunics and covers) and were carrying candles. Designated confreres were carrying images and flags. Each fraternity wanted to have at least two flags, one with the image of the patron saint or the image of one of the mysteries of faith and the second the mourning flag.<sup>32</sup> There were also special types of confraternities: scapular confraternities, fraternities of Good Death, and in honour of Saint Barbara, whose main purpose was to care for a worthy preparation for death and to pray for the souls suffering in purgatory. In addition, fraternities of the Saint Scapular possessed the so called Saturday's privilege, that is the promise for the soul that it will be released by Our Lady from the torture in purgatory of on the first Saturday after death.<sup>33</sup> The commemoration of the

30 Józef Mitkowski, "Księga zmarłych bractwa kościoła Panny Marii w Krakowie (wiek XIV–XVIII)," *Studia Historyczne* 11/1 (1968), pp. 71–81.

31 For example, one of the clauses of the statute of the priest confraternity in Pilzno: "*Sep-timo: Quia fraternitates ideo sunt constitutae, ut tam vivis, quam defunctis signa dilectionis invicem exhibeant ac vere diligant, tenebuntur quotidie omnes et singuli confratres unum Pater noster, Ave Maria et Credo cum collecta: Defende, quaesumus Domine, beata Maria semper Virgine interdedente etc. pro congregatione; quolibet vero quartuali presbyteri duas missas: unam pro vivis, alteram pro defunctis confratribus in suis ecclesiis [celebrare]; laici vero quinque Pater noster, totidem Ave Maria, unum Credo, unum pro vivis, alterum pro defunctis recitare vel recitari facere,*" in B. Kumor, ed., "Statuty bractwa literackiego nauki chrześcijańskiej przy kolegiacie św. Małgorzaty w Nowym Sączu," *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 2:1–2 (1961), p. 390.

32 Dominika Burdzy, "Religious Confraternities in a Polish Town: The Case in Sandomierz from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *Confraternitas* 15:2 (2004), pp. 13–14, 15, and 18–19; Hanna Zaremska, *Bractwa w średniowiecznym Krakowie: Studium form społecznych życia religijnego* (Wrocław, Warsaw, Krakow, and Gdansk, 1977), pp. 56 and 139–53; Zaremska, "Żywi," pp. 733–48. Similar obligations had the confraternities in other countries: Jiří Mikulec, "Náboženská bratrstva – institucionalizovaná zbožnost i smrt," in *Církev a smrt: Institucionalizace smrti v raném novověku*, eds. M. Hol and J. Mikulec, (Folia Historica Bohemica, Supplementum) 1 (Prague, 2007), pp. 163–86; Nicholas Terpstra, "Death and Dying in Renaissance Confraternities," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Kalamazoo, 1991), pp. 179–200; Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, pp. 163–68.

33 Bronisław Panek, "Dzieje Bractwa Szkaplerza Świętego przy kościele OO. Karmelitów w Krakowie na Piasku do końca XVII wieku," *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 10 (1963), pp. 39–59.

dead by religious fraternities attracted new members and affected the number of testamentary legacies bequeathed for them by the townspeople.

Many fraternal communities received indulgences.<sup>34</sup> In exchange for the fulfillment of certain conditions, confreres could receive forgiveness of sins for themselves and for the dead. Among the duties were: accession to the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion, participation in masses on certain holidays during the liturgical year, recitation of various prayers, also for the dead, accompanying the priest in delivering the *viaticum* (last anointing) to the dying, and visits to the cemetery. These types of indulgences, granted since the Middle Ages, opened the way for the development of the idea of intercession for the souls of the dead suspended in purgatory. Between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries Lesser Poland received the biggest number of indulgences of all the provinces of the Republic, especially as indulgences were granted not only to brotherhoods, but also to altars, hospitals, and diocesan and monastic churches. Some of those indulgences were granted to the deceased. It was believed that they would facilitate the transition of the soul from purgatory to heaven. Unfortunately, the faithful often misinterpreted the formulas contained in indulgences, being convinced that after reciting the Lord's Prayer 15 times, 15 souls would be released from the torture in purgatory, 15 sinners would repent, and 15 just would reinforce their good resolutions.<sup>35</sup>

### Commemoration of the Dead in Convent Prayers

An interesting form of commemoration of the dead by religious orders was the custom of inviting them to participate in all the graces granted to a particular monastery (*participationem omnium bonorum*). The basis for this practice

34 Bolesław Kumor, ed., "Średniowieczne przyczynki źródłowe do dziejów bractwa literackiego Najów: Maryi Panny w Bochni i do salin bocheńskich," *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 1/2 (1960), pp. 181–83; Burdzy, *Religious Confraternities*, pp. 15 and 17; Zaremska, *Bractwa*, pp. 137–39.

35 Wiktor Szymborski, *Odpusty w Polsce średniowiecznej* (Kraków, 2011), pp. 155–220; Wiktor Szymborski, "Uwagi o religijności społeczności Małopolski w średniowieczu na przykładzie brackich dokumentów odpustowych," in *Wspólnoty małe i duże w społeczeństwach Czech i Polski w średniowieczu i w czasach nowożytnych*, eds. I. Iwańczak and J. Smółucha (Kraków, 2010), pp. 159–83; Szymborski, "Niebiańska ekonomia – uwagi o funkcjonowaniu odpustów w kręgu zakonów mendykantkich w średniowiecznej Polsce," in *Inter oeconomiam coelestem et terrenam: Mendykanci a zagadnienia ekonomiczne*, eds. Wiesław Długokęcki, Tomasz Gałuszka, Rafał Kubiki, and Anna Zajchowska (Kraków, 2011), pp. 129–30.

was the dogma of the Communion of Saints, which was manifested in recording the names of the dead in special books and their commemoration confirmed in prayers. Special agreements were concluded on the basis of which a monastery, several convents, a province or the whole order promised to pray for individuals of different states, for the municipalities, guilds, and religious brotherhoods.<sup>36</sup> This meant their spiritual participation in the benefits of masses celebrated by the order, their prayers, sermons, fasts, vigils, sacrifices, and other good deeds. Benefactors of monasteries could also count on perpetual masses (*missa perpetua*) and the burial in the monastery church.<sup>37</sup> Their names were recorded in special books called obituaries or necrologies (*libri mortuorum*). They were ordered in a calendar manner where each day was attributed to one or more benefactors, based on the date of their death or the date of submission of the donation.<sup>38</sup>

- 36 On the files of the provincial chapter houses of Dominicans in Poland a chapter was being written down under the title *Ista sunt suffragia mortuorum/defunctorum*, e.g.: (1514) "Item pro anima olim r[everendi] patris provincialis mag[ist]ri Alberti ac pro animabus omnium patrum et matrum, fratrum et sororum provinciae nostrae Poloniae, quilibet sacerdos unam missam. Item pro animabus eorum, qui dum viverunt fuerunt recepti per litteras ad beneficia ordinis, et pro animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum, quilibet sacerdos unam missam. Loco missae clericus se[p]tem psalmos et conversi qui[n]quaginta Pater noster totidem et Ave Maris dicant," Roman F. Madura, ed., *Acta capitulorum provinciae Poloniae Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 1 (Roma, 1972), p. 215.
- 37 Rafał Kubicki, "Participationem omnium bonorum: Forma i znaczenie przyjęcia do udziału w dobrach duchowych zakonu na przykładzie mendykantów w państwie zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach," *Nasza Przeszłość* 112 (2009), pp. 55–86; Piwowarczyk, *Pobożne legaty*, pp. 212–13.
- 38 For comparison see: Basil Frantz Grassl, ed., *Das älteste Totenbuch des Praemonstratenser Chorfraustiftes Chotieschau (1200–1640)*, (*Analecta Praemonstratensia*) 7 (1931); *Necrologium Doxanense*, in *Zprávy o zasedání Královské české společnosti nauk v Praze: Přednášky v sezeních třídy pro filosofii, dějepis a filologii*, (roč. 1884), ed. J. Emler (Prague, 1885), pp. 83–144; Charles Hilken, ed., *The Necrology of San Nicola Della Cicogna: (Montecassino, Archivio Della Badia 179, pp. 1–64)*, (*Monumenta Liturgica Beneventana*) 2 (Toronto, 2000); Charles Hilken, *Memory and Community in Medieval Southern Italy: The History, Chapter Book, and Necrology of Santa Maria Del Gualdo Mazzocca* (Toronto, 2008). On the role of necrologies, see Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Memoriał i przekaz memoratywny we wczesnym średniowieczu," in *Spółczesność średniowiecza: Mentalność – grupy społeczne – formy życia*, trans. M.A. Nowak et al. (Torun, 2000), pp. 45–73; Zbigniew Perzanowski, "Nekrolog formą dokumentacji życia społecznego w średniowieczu," in *Powstanie – przepływy – gromadzenie informacji: Materiały z I Symposium nauk dających poznać źródła historyczne: Problemy warsztatu historyka*, ed. Jan Pakulski (Torun, 1978), p. 84; Michał Kaczmarek "Nekrolog lubiąski: Próba krytyki przekazu," *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 26 (1981), pp. 113–39; Jerzy Rajman, "Średniowieczne zapiski w nekrologu klasztoru norbertanek



Prayers to commemorate the dead monks or nuns were further remembrance practices of religious orders. Not only did they pray for the members of the order, but also sent out letters informing about the death of a monk or nun to other monasteries, mostly those operating within the same province. In this way, the deceased was provided with a wide range of prayers by members from different monasteries.<sup>39</sup> The practice originated as early as in the eighth century, for fear of – according to Philippe Ariès – death and, particularly, the world beyond the grave. Significant in this respect was the mass celebrated for the souls of the dead which additionally united the religious community and was a manifestation of brotherly love.<sup>40</sup>

### Funeral Sermons

In addition to these commemorative practices, funeral sermons became customary in the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These sermons were delivered during funeral masses and later issued in print. A large number of such sermons survived until today, letting us better understand biographies and contributions of the clergy and the nobility. The right to praise the deceased came from the fragment from the Book of Proverbs (10:7): “By praise shall the just be remembered but the name of the wicked shall perish.” This was to emphasise the traditional aim of the funeral speech which was to record the memory of the deceased, his deeds and virtues, for future generations.<sup>41</sup> For men, the sermons mainly focused on their public activity, offices they held, their participation in military expeditions, and contributions for the king or the local community. The sermons for the dead women emphasised

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na Żwierzyńcu,” *Nasza Przeszłość* 32 (1992), pp. 33–55; Krzysztof Kaczmarek, “Nekrolog opactwa cystersów w Paradyżu,” in *Opactwo cysterskie w Paradyżu – jego rola w dziejach i kulturze pogranicza*, ed. Joanna Karczewska (Zielona Góra, 2003), pp. 39–45; Krzysztof Kaczmarek, “Nekrolog dominikanów poznańskich,” *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 43 (2005), pp. 125–50; Bożena Czwojdrak, “Wiarygodność wpisów obituarnych w nekrologach krakowskich klasztorów mendykanckich w średniowieczu,” in *Mendykanci w średniowiecznym Krakowie*, eds. Krzysztof Ożóg, Tomasz Gałuszka, and Anna Zajchowska (Krakow, 2008), pp. 75–81.

39 Anna Szylar, “Nekrologi mniszek polskich z drugiej połowy XVIII i XIX wieku zwarte w korespondencji do benedyktynek sandomierskich,” *Nasza Przeszłość* 107 (2007), pp. 145–224.

40 Ariès, *Człowiek*.

41 Dobrosława Platt, *Kazania pogrzebowe z przełomu XVI i XVII wieku: Z dziejów prozy staropolskiej* (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Krakow, 1992), p. 6.

their devotion and their role as mothers and wives, doing business, and taking care of the family hearth. With regard to nuns, attention was drawn to their activity within the convent, especially administrative, business, charitable, cultural, and, for those who taught in monastic schools, their educational activity.<sup>42</sup> Funeral speeches were low-key, not polemical. Thus, the trend was that their predominant element was praise as well as moderation and good taste.

Hieronim Powodowski's (1543–1613) sermons were particularly imbued with biblical and patristic spirit while the funeral eulogies by Piotr Skarga SJ (1536–1612) were calm and deeply melancholic. Apart from this trend, some of the sixteenth-century sermons took the form of dogmatic and apologetic considerations. An example could be a sermon by Stanisław Grodzicki SJ (1541–1613) which is a comprehensive theological treatise on purgatory. He gave it at the funeral of Katarzyna Radziwiłł (c. 1544–92), a noblewoman from the Catholic Tęczyńscy family, which was attended by her Calvinist husband, Krzysztof "Pi-orun" Radziwiłł (1547–1603) with his ministers and fellow believers. A few days later, Andrzej Chrzastowski (1555–1618), a Calvinist preacher, gave a polemical sermon to the congregation in Vilnius, which later appeared in print. As a result, Grodzicki decided to publish his sermon in 1593, adding a polemical part. In the same year he published the second sermon, delivered at the funeral of Prince Albert Radziwiłł (1558–92), Marshall of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The aim of funeral sermons printed in the mother tongue was to reach a wider audience, both Catholic and Protestant. This type of sermon also offered the opportunity to create role-models and anti-role-models to teach about what qualities or acts deserved condemnation, not only on earth but also in the afterlife. For this reason, preachers willingly used the Polish language rather than Latin, securing a greater ability to influence.<sup>43</sup> New trends which resulted in the revival of Catholic preaching began to reach Poland in the 1520s. Erasmus

42 Juliusz A. Chrościcki, *Pompa funebris: Z dziejów kultury staropolskiej* (Warsaw, 1974), pp. 67–87; Bogdan Rok, *Zagadnienie śmierci w kulturze Rzeczypospolitej czasów saskich* (Wrocław, 1991); Bogdan Rok, "Druki żałobne w dawnej Polsce XVI–XVIII w.," in *Wesela, chrzciny i pogrzeby w XVI–XVIII wieku: Kultura życia i śmierci*, ed. Henryk Suchojad (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 187–201; Maria Rowińska-Szczepaniak, "Królowe 'pamięcią pogrzebną wspomniane': Fabian Birkowski o Annie Jagiellonce i Konstancji Habsburżance," in *Dominikanie na ziemiach polskich w epoce nowożytnej*, eds. Anna Markiewicz and Marek Miławicki (Kraków, 2009), pp. 137–51; Filip Wolański, "Rola kobiety w społeczeństwie Rzeczypospolitej epoki saskiej w świetle bernardyńskich kazań pogrzebowych," in *Per mulierem ... Kobieta w dawnej Polsce – w średniowieczu i w dobie staropolskiej*, eds. Katarzyna Justyniarska-Chojak and Sylwia Konarska-Zimnicka (Warsaw, 2012), pp. 279–85.

43 Platt, *Kazania*, p. 9.

of Rotterdam had a significant impact on the preachers who began to move away from the camera complex scholastic apparatus in favour of a positive lecture based on the results of accurate biblical and patristic studies.<sup>44</sup>

### Burials in the Interiors of Churches

Discussing issues of preparation for death, attention should also be drawn to the burials inside churches. In that period, the inside of a temple was considered the most appropriate and the safest place to rest the deceased. This emerged from the belief that a dead resting near the relics of saints and martyrs will enjoy their effective intercession on Judgement Day.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the faithful coming to the church better remembered to pray for those buried inside than those buried at the cemetery. If one could not bury the body in the church, the alternative was to try to find a place as close to the entrance as possible. A burial inside the temple was available only for the few, mostly they were meritorious members of the community, clergy and laity (founders, benefactors), and those who could afford it. Moreover, the church authorities sought to control and restrict such burials and erections of tombstones in concern for the appearance of the interior of the church and the condition of walls. Such precise control, e.g., by the Sandomierz collegiate chapter, was necessary to keep order in the church and to secure conditions for dignified processions inside the temple. A major problem was the stench of decomposing bodies, which made it difficult to celebrate services and could result in an epidemic. Initially, the dead were buried in tombs, but over time the mortal remains were rested under the floor of the church, which in turn led to its deformation.<sup>46</sup>

Places of burial were marked by laying a memorial gravestone (tombstone), representing the dead according to the prevailing style in art, but mostly as a person in the peaceful eternal sleep. It gave the living a sense of a well prepared,

44 Mieczysław Brzozowski, "Teoria kaznodziejstwa (wiek XVI–XVIII)," in *Dzieje teologii katolickiej w Polsce*, 2, *Od Odrodzenia do Oświecenia 1: Teologia humanistyczna*, ed. M. Rechowicz (Lublin, 1975), pp. 367–76 and 388.

45 Antoni Nowowiejski, *Wykład liturgji Kościoła katolickiego*, vol. 1, Part 2 (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 1241–42.

46 Dominika Burdzy, "Pochówki i fundacje szlacheckie w kolegiacie sandomierskiej w XV–XVII wieku," in *Z życia religijnego szlachty i ziemiaństwa między Wisłą a Pilicą w XVI–XX wieku*, eds. Jerzy Gapys, Mariusz Nowak, and Jacek Pielas (Kielce 2014), pp. 33–45.

respectful and dignified burial of the body of the deceased and ensured proper commemoration within the community. An apt comment is provided by Saint Augustine (354–430) in his *De Civitate Dei*: “*Sepulchrorum memoria magis est vivorum consolatio, quam defunctorum utilitas*” (Remembering about the graves is much more consolation for the living than for the dead<sup>47</sup>). Epitaphs also served to commemorate the dead and to highlight their achievements. Such inscriptions gave basic information about the deceased, their titles, offices, family connections, and merits. They were founded by the heirs, relatives, friends, and executors of the last will of the deceased, which was in line with the contemporary practice.<sup>48</sup> They were placed on the walls, pillars, and floors of the temple. Such tombstones and gravestones were also a sign of the prestige and the wealth of the person to whom they were dedicated, which could be determined from the type of material they were made of, the image of the deceased and elaborate decoration.

A very important source to analyse this issue is the work published in 1655 by Simon Starowolski (1588–1656), *Monumenta Sarmatarum, Viam Universae carnis ingressorum* where he collected epitaphs from all across Poland, including those from Galicia. Most of them have not survived in the original form until today. Thanks to this work, we know that not only cathedrals, as the one in Krakow, but also collegiate (Sandomierz, Wiślica, Lublin, and Kielce), parish and monastery churches in the cities and towns of Lesser Poland were decorated with numerous epitaphs. Apart from the commemorative function, they were an expression of the characteristics of a particular urban center, such as mining in Olkusz. Namely, the walls of the parish church were embedded with gravestones and cartouche with characteristic citizens' crests (*gmerki*). In 1592, murals were created on the walls of the chancel depicting four Olkusz miners who were wearing mining uniforms and carrying hoes (*grace*) on their shoulders. They were holding up two coats of arms, one was the arms of the city and the other the arms of the Polish Kingdom.<sup>49</sup>

47 Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei* I 12.

48 Waldemar Kowalski, “Do zmartwychwstania swego za pewnym wodzem Kristusem ...”: *Staropolskie inskrypcje północno-zachodniej Małopolski* (Kielce, 2004); Waldemar Kowalski, “Szydłowiecka epigrafika doby baroku,” in *Studia z dziejów Szydłowca: Materiały sesji popularnonaukowej 18 lutego 1995 roku*, eds. Zenon Guldon and Jacek Wijaczka (Szydłowiec, 1995), pp. 23–38; Jerzy Sperka, “Nekropolie możnowładcze w krakowskich klasztorach mendykancich w średniowieczu,” in *Mendykanci w średniowiecznym Krakowie*, eds. Krzysztof Ożóg, Tomasz Gałuszka, and Anna Zajchowska (Krakow, 2008), pp. 59–73.

49 Molenda, *Dzieje Olkusza*, pp. 258 and 260.

## Conclusion

The concern for salvation after death was primarily manifested in the efforts to secure prayers of the living. The living, on the other hand, could count on the intercession of the dead with God and obtaining the necessary graces. Prayers were a way of uniting the living with the dead, they relieved the pain and longing after the loss of a loved one. Participation in the eucharist (mass) as a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ, helped understand the mystery of death. Similarly, the belief that all of His followers would also resurrect gave hope to meet with the family on the last day. Moreover, people believed that if the living prayed for the dead, there would be someone who would pray for them after their death.

All the above source information confirms that both the townspeople as well as the clergy and the nobility living in cities tried to secure prayers for their souls. A variety of actions were undertaken for this purpose, such as bequeathing of funds for the celebration of masses, anniversary masses, Gregorian masses, and funding of religious institutions, which were obliged to celebrate masses for the founder.

The differences between the Catholics and the Protestants were evident in the content of wills. The Catholics expressed the hope that God would take their good deeds into account, and through the passion of Christ their sins would be redeemed. Also, some wills contained a supplication for the intercession of Mary and the Saints. The Protestants emphasised that they would receive the grace of the resurrection by the mercy of God and the merits of Christ. Confraternities and guilds took care of the deceased members through participation in prayers, masses on Dry Days, and processions. Such practices strengthened the ties within the guild as they were a proof of mutual concern not only in this life but also in the afterlife. The visible traces of that care were chapels, altars, tombs and graves, epitaphs, various liturgical vestments, and paraments donated to temples in exchange for prayers. The foundations of various institutions, such as altars in churches, were equally important as the beneficiaries were obliged to celebrate a certain number of masses for the benefactors and their heirs.

The residents of Lesser Poland did not differ much from the believers from other parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or even the area of Catholic Europe, in their efforts to secure salvation and prayers after the inevitable, though unexpected, death. Still, it is clear that with its natural resources, which determined the development of mining and metallurgy, Lesser Poland stood out from other regions of the state. The specificity of mining lay in the high risk of loss of life or health, which accounted for the formation of guilds and

religious brotherhoods. They were involved in religious activity, charity, and prayerful remembrance of the dead miners. Nevertheless, the universality of the Catholic Church provided grounds for that lack of obvious differences. Many commemorative practices from Western Europe had already reached Poland in the Middle Ages and had been adapted to local needs. The sense of community within the Church gave the faithful the opportunity to draw from the treasury of grace even after death.

# Death with an Agenda: Preparing for an Aristocratic Death in Reformation Sweden

Anu Lahtinen

## Introduction

My chapter<sup>1</sup> deals with accounts of men and women of high nobility, aristocracy, preparing for their own deaths in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Sweden. The seventeenth century offers posterity plenty of funeral sermons and so-called *personalia*, Lutheran obituaries or funeral biographies in which the departure of a dying person was described in terms of *mors beata*, the ideal and conventional description of death. Originally inspired by descriptions of Martin Luther's (1483–1546) pious departure, *personalia* presented an individual example of *ars moriendi*.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the sixteenth century, the sources are more scattered. However, there are some surviving descriptions of noble persons preparing for death in the late 1590s, in many cases following the principles that were also present in later *personalia*.<sup>3</sup>

1 This article has been written under the auspices of projects *Gender and Family in Finland, Medieval to Modern* (Emil Aaltonen Fund) and *Letters and Songs: Registers of Beliefs and Expressions in the Early Modern North* (Academy of Finland, project no. 288119).

2 About funeral biographies in Lutheran Germany and Scandinavia, see Volker Leppin, "Preparing for Death. From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon," in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9–23; Eivor Andersen Oftestad, "Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem *De Vita Hominis* in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark," in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05\\_eivor\\_final\\_2.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154766/05_eivor_final_2.pdf?sequence=1), accessed 25 Aug. 2017, pp. 194–95; About *mors beata* in a Swedish context, for example, Göran Stenberg, *Döden dikterar: En studie av likpredikningar och gravtal från 1600- och 1700-talen* (Stockholm, 1998); Markus Hagberg, ed., *Jean Gersons Ars moriendi: Om konsten att dö*, (Skara stiftshistoriska sällskaps skriftserie) 45 (Skara, 2009); Otfried Czaika's chapter in this volume.

3 See, for example, *Personalia* in *Skoklostersamlingen* 1, vol. 74, Riksarkivet (National Archives of Sweden) [hereafter RA], Stockholm, Sweden.

The *personalia* have been previously studied in order to discover biographic information, gendered representations, or other representations of an idealised life course and Lutheran representations of a *mors beata*. Likewise, the idea of *mors beata* has been analysed via *personalia*. In the following, however, I will take a different starting point and focus on a detailed analysis of special cases. I will combine analyses of *personalia* and other kinds of sources describing the preparations for death. My focus shall be on the agendas and the messages directed to those who would be left behind.<sup>4</sup> Thus, I go beyond searching for the general ideal of *ars moriendi* and focus on the practical adaptations that people resorted to, or were described resorting to. In other words, my focus is on how the dying person – and those who would later describe her or his death – coped with the fact that a death never quite followed the ideal pattern. Attention is also paid to the observation by Otfried Czaika, presented elsewhere in this volume, that in the Reformation period, one's whole life was seen as a preparation for death.

I shall begin with the observation that although Reformation *ars moriendi* put emphasis on the individual, denying the power of intercession of family members,<sup>5</sup> preparing for death was not only a personal issue between a dying (noble) person, God, and the closest family members. Nor were descriptions of death preparations neutral accounts; instead, emphasis was placed on the social status, political role, and other material matters of the persons involved. A noble death and its accounts had political, economic, and social consequences, most strikingly so in such times of political turmoil that hit Sweden at the turn of the seventeenth century. Even in more peaceful times, however, many economic or personal issues could be at stake, and *personalia* and other documents could address these issues.

The ultimate moments, final greetings, and last wishes or wills were a very powerful way of communicating the values and interests of the dying to those left behind. It is also very illustrative of the social dynamics of the time to discover who was active in constructing, maintaining, and distributing the descriptions. Thus, in the following, I shall introduce political, economic, and other agendas that can be deciphered in the descriptions of a noble death.

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4 Previously, I have analysed power and resistance in connection with the execution of Johan Fleming. See Anu Lahtinen, "A Nobleman's Death: Power Struggle and Resistance in Accounts of a Political Execution in Early Modern Sweden," in *Rebellion and Resistance*, ed. Henrik Jensen (Pisa, 2009), pp. 33–49.

5 Oftestad, "Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife," pp. 115–25.



## Preparing for Death: Theory and Practice

As is well known, accounts of early modern deathbed scenes usually follow the medieval tradition of *mors beata*, the ideal course of preparing for departure. The dying person was supposed to excel in *ars moriendi*, art of dying, and to follow a certain procedure when preparing to meet one's maker. This procedure was famously presented in 1408 in the guidelines titled *De arte moriendi* by Jean Gerson (1363–1429), and later in the Reformation period, new versions and guidelines were given in service books in Latin and in vernacular languages.<sup>6</sup> It was important to resign to the inevitable, to turn to the afterlife with the help of a priest, pious prayers, and bidding near relatives and others farewell and trying to make peace with those who would be left behind. Finally, the person was expected to entrust her/himself to the will of God and to part hence in God's grace.<sup>7</sup>

This pattern has been typical for other periods and times as well: anthropologists have discussed the notion of "good death" in different societies. Now as then, many cultures placed emphasis on the need to face death peacefully, in harmony with God and other human beings. After the moment of death, an honourable burial was also an essential part of a good death, as I have discussed in another article, and preparations for the funeral and arrangements for a respectable burial place were often done well beforehand.<sup>8</sup> Quite understandably, the Reformation brought some changes to the medieval Catholic *ars moriendi*, as the intercessions of relatives no longer paid any role and as purgatory no longer offered a chance to repent in the hereafter. New *ars moriendi* literature, such as *Seelenartznei* (1529) by Reformator Urbanus Rhegius (1489–1541), was published in vernacular language, including Swedish.<sup>9</sup>

6 About *ars moriendi* and Jean Gerson in Sweden, see, for example, Stenberg, *Döden dikterar*; Markus Hagberg, ed., *Jean Gersons Ars moriendi*; About actual service book texts in the sixteenth century, see Matti Parvio, ed., *Manuale seu exequiale Aboense 1522*, (Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia) 115 (Helsinki, 1980), pp. 22–50 and 146–52; Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Uppsala 2008), pp. 131–65; Kaisa Häkkinen, ed., *Codex Westh: Westhins koodeksin teksti*, (Wanhansuomen arkisto) 5, (Turku, 2012), pp. 110–18.

7 Stenberg, *Döden dikterar*, pp. 145–50; Liisa Lagerstam, *A Noble Life: The Cultural Biography of Gabriel Kurck (1630–1712)*, trans. Susan Sinisalo, (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Humaniora) 349 (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 195–202.

8 Lahtinen, "A Nobleman's Death," p. 40.

9 Urbanus Rhegius, *Sielennes tröst och läkedom*, trans. N.N. (Stockholm, 1548); Oftestad, "Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife," pp. 106–83; Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, eds., *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015).

Funeral sermons and *personalia*, of course, tend to repeat the patterns of a good death. It was customary to describe the dying person to have lived a pious life, to have been a devout Christian, and to have departed beautifully and piously in due time. The plot for dying was important for the contemporaries, and they did their best to imitate the ideal manuscript. This does not mean that the descriptions were all of a piece. There were variations, from more politically motivated topics to descriptions of special incidents, such as *personalia* describing little Gertrud Fleming's death soon after her father. Gertrud was eight years old when her father died, and the *personalia* explained her demise by the great sorrow and constant crying for the lost father that led to high fever and, ultimately, to her death.<sup>10</sup>

A sudden death, especially a death of close family members, was a shock, then as now. Around the year 1601, the widowed Countess Sigrid Sture (1538–1613) described the agony of her late lamented son, Erik Turesson Bielke (1564–99), in the face of the death of his wife Anna Lewenhaupt (1558–99) and their little son. In an autobiographical poem, underlining the incalculability of mundane happiness, Sigrid told how her son Erik Bielke was away on a journey while his wife and son unexpectedly died. According to Sigrid, her son came back, eager to meet his family, and had to face the news. "I never saw him happy again," commented the grieving mother on the reactions of Erik Bielke, who soon afterwards also died.<sup>11</sup>

Even shocks of this kind, however, could serve as steps in preparing for death, at least as a reminder for those left behind. In her aforementioned poem Sigrid Sture placed emphasis on her observations of the fickleness of worldly joy brought by wealth or family. She informed that she now placed her hope on the world of hereafter, where genuine godly love and happiness could be expected to come true.<sup>12</sup> The elderly and ailing Sigrid Sture was preparing for her own death, too. That was, at least, how she presented herself, resigned and already focusing on the afterlife. In her poem, she described herself hoping to be relieved of her sufferings:<sup>13</sup>

10 Herman Fleming (1619–73) (and his daughter Gertrud Fleming), *Personalia*, Skoklostersamlingen 1, vol. 74, RA.

11 "[I]agh sågh hono: aldrigh seeden gladh," Jan Samuelson, "Att vinna ärans krona: En 1500-talskvinna skriver om sitt liv," in *Tid och tillit: En vänbok till Eva Österberg*, eds. Irene Andersson, Kenneth Johansson, and Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (Stockholm, 2002), pp. 139–63, here p. 150.

12 Samuelson, "Att vinna ärans krona."

13 Original among Sigrid Sture's papers in *Bielkesamlingen*, Adliga ätten Bielke, vol. 9, E 1993, RA; Samuelson, "Att vinna ärans krona," pp. 149–51 and *passim*.

I have no hopes for a longer life,  
 as I am now burdened by both age and sorrow,  
 many dark things I have gone through during 60 years.  
 I believe that this worldly suffering  
 will be compensated with the crown of Glory  
 redeemed sinless for me  
 by our Redeemer Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

While the process of resignation and *mors beata* focused on the transition to the hereafter, other documents also inform us of the worldlier aspects of preparations. Settling one's economic commitments was a lengthy process; especially when it came to aristocracy, different arrangements were made decades before the death to ensure the division of property and the future of those left behind. In addition, plans for proper funerals and gravestones were made and executed well in advance. The most prominent plans were made by the Royal House: for example, the last will of Gustav I Vasa, King of Sweden (r. 1523–60), was a paramount manifestation of how he wanted to present himself, guide his sons, and pass on power to his children.<sup>15</sup> Aristocrats could give similar guidelines on their deathbed or in the testament, although on a smaller scale.<sup>16</sup>

Baron Henrik Fleming of Lais (1584–1650), for example, gave a detailed plan for his funeral in his last will. Already during his lifetime, he had donated pulpits and other movables to churches that were located near his estates or in ecclesiastic centres of the realm. A gravestone had been prepared for him, a stele in which he was portrayed resting with his first wife, Ebba Bååt (1587–1630). While the Lutheran Church no longer organised masses or guaranteed salvation via economic investment, it was imperative for an aristocrat to think of her or his afterlife in the memory of the community. This afterlife was guaranteed by the visibility of the coats of arms and other memorial text and pictures that were placed in the churches to which she or he had given donations.<sup>17</sup> To be remembered by the family and the community was of importance, and

14 As quoted in Samuelson, "Att vinna ärans krona," p. 163.

15 Nils Edén, ed., *Brev av Gustav Vasa: Ett urval* (Stockholm, 1917), pp. 151–65.

16 See, for example, the plans of father Klas Fleming (of the Manor of Lehtinen) and his son Henrik Fleming in the 1610s and 1640s, as described in Samuel Loenbom, ed., *Uplysningar i Swenska Historien* 1 (Stockholm, 1768), pp. 68–69; Tuija Tuhkanen, *Kirkon kaunistukseksi ja lahjoittajan kunniaksi: Henrik Flemingin lahjoitukset Suomen kirkoissa*, (Historiallisia tutkimuksia) 238 (Helsinki, 2008).

17 Tuhkanen, *Kirkon kaunistukseksi*.

while in the pre-Reformation period the family members had been requested to make intercessions to help the dying or dead relative, during the Reformation period more emphasis was put on arranging the funeral.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to public image that was considered important for the afterlife, personal items of remembrance were significant in the final farewells between family members. These items were typically rings or other small but valuable private belongings that were essential for defining the post-mortem identity of the deceased and ensuring their commemoration.<sup>19</sup> When bidding farewell to his sorrowful mother Sigrid Sture, the aforementioned Erik Bielke gave her his pocket watch.<sup>20</sup> Gifts were tokens of affection and remembrance. When aristocrat Hogenskild Bielke (1538–1605) made preparations for his execution, having been sentenced to die by beheading for vehement writings against the regent, he gave a touching speech asking for permission to give his daughter the only golden item he owned – a golden ring, a gift from his wife when she was on her deathbed. Hogenskild Bielke's wife Anna Sture (1541–95), in her turn, had received the ring from her brother.<sup>21</sup>

Presents could mediate mixed messages: in the early seventeenth century, when the elderly Baron Nils Gyllenstierna (1526–1601) felt that he would not live very much longer – although his death was not imminent – he sent his daughters a chalice, telling them to drink from it and remember the passion of Christ.<sup>22</sup> The somewhat bitter and gloomy tone of the letter might give reason to interpret it as reproach from the side of the elderly father to his daughters – and maybe also as a hidden invitation for reconciliation before the final separation.

Some attention should also be paid to the audience. Who was thought to be the primary receiver of the message? Family correspondence was up close and personal, however the letters were also read aloud and copied. For funeral

18 Oftestad, "Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife," pp. 119–20.

19 J.S.W. Helt, "Women, memory and will-making in Elizabethan England," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 188–205, here p. 205.

20 Helsingius' Likpredikan öfver Erik Bjelke och hans hustru Anna Lejonhufvud [...] 1600 [...], Handskrifter, Biogr.Sv. 1.b. 33, Kungliga biblioteket (The Royal Library of Sweden), Stockholm, Sweden.

21 Fridolf Ödberg, *Anteckningar om riksrådet Hogenskild Bielkes friherreskap Leckö (1571–1599)* (Skara, 1892), p. 27. On gifts and remembrance mentioned in this section, see also Anu Lahtinen, "Lahjat ja aatelin suhdeverkostot 1500-luvun Ruotsissa," in *Esine ja aika: Materiaalisen kulttuurin historiaa*, eds. Maija Mäkilä and Riitta Laitinen, (Historiallinen Arkisto) 130 (Helsinki, 2010), pp. 34–65.

22 Nils Gyllenstierna's letter to his daughters, 27 Aug. 1601, Skoklosterssamlingen II:5, RA.

sermons, the primary audience could be the funeral guests, but the choice of words also often reveals that certain important relatives were more on the focus. For example, the funeral sermon and *personalia* of the aforementioned Erik Bielke focuses almost solely on the maternal side of his ancestors, and the relation between the mother and the son. At one point, the text takes a bold excursion to discuss the position of Erik Bielke's uncle, Karl Sture, and Erik almost becomes a minor character in his own funeral. All these details suggest a strong influence from Sigrid Sture's side.<sup>23</sup> As we will see, many other accounts have also been written the mighty female relatives who had been left behind.

### Preparations for the Unexpected Death

Given the many hazards and dangers in the early modern world, there were times when circumstances such as sudden illnesses, accidents, war, or violence prevented people from even moderately following the course of ideal preparations for death. A person facing sudden illness would rather not face departure without proper farewell of and guidance for those left behind. For example, when Baron Klas Fleming (c. 1535–97) fell ill while travelling in 1597, he first tried to continue the journey at any cost, hoping to meet his wife for the last time; according to the accounts of his final moments, he would have wanted to pass on important information before his demise. Big political decisions were at stake, as Klas Fleming had tried to protect the interests of King Sigismund (r. 1592–99) against Duke Karl of Södermanland (1550–1611, later King Charles IX, r. 1604–11), to the extent of violently suppressing a rebellion in Northern and Central areas of Finland. When it became evident that Klas Fleming would not survive a journey to his wife, he resigned, and did his best to make as good preparations as possible in the short time that was left.<sup>24</sup>

The description of the last moments of Klas Fleming survives as it is reported by his widow, Baroness Ebba Gustavsdotter Stenbock (d. 1614), who wanted to reject any rumours and speculations about the death of her husband. She had not been present at the moment of her husband's death, but apparently she relied on the accounts of servants on the matter. She sent a description to her sister, Queen Dowager Katarina Stenbock (1535–1621), that follows the

23 Helsingius' Likpredikan öfver Erik Bjelke och hans hustru Anna Lejonhufvud [...] 1600 [...] Handskrifter, Biogr.Sv. 1.b. 33, Kungliga biblioteket (The Royal Library of Sweden), Stockholm, Sweden.

24 See Richard van Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens: Gerichtspraxis und Strafrituale in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1988), pp. 161–79; Lahtinen, "A Nobleman's Death," pp. 36–43.

pattern of *mors beata*. Baroness Ebba's account admits that something important was missing – the presence of the family. However, the struggle is turned into a relatively successful departure, given the circumstances:

Neither do I doubt that those who did not wish him [Klas Fleming] well during his lifetime would like to spread false rumours of his Christian departure. That is why I humbly want to inform Your Majesty that he departed in the Lord's grace [...] and asked his barber-surgeon, Master Marcus, to read holy texts to him, and entrusted his life and soul to the hands and will of God Almighty, and passed away in a dignified manner, so that I can have consolation of it through all the sorrowful days of my life [...].<sup>25</sup>

As was taught by Reformatory texts, the pious and righteous people died peacefully, as they could count on salvation by faith.<sup>26</sup> Thus, dying peacefully, Klas Fleming proved that he had been pious, and indirectly also provided his political agenda with an additional touch of legitimacy. Ebba's letter was apparently meant to circulate; indeed, it survives as a copy in a collection of copied documents with accounts about the political turmoil of the time.<sup>27</sup> The letter also portrays the political and social consequences of the death of an aristocrat. For enemies, a sudden death opened up possibilities for spiteful speculations about the reasons behind the demise, and Klas Fleming had many antagonists. An account of a worthy death, or the lack of it, was an important asset in the

25 "Twifler och icke att den som honom Vthi hans Lijffztijd missVnthe, något gott efftertaal skole och hans Christelige afgång gerne till thz wärste Vttyde, På det E: M:t Vthi sanning gunstelige teckes att förnimma hans beskerde Christelige död af Gudj försedd, låter iagh E: M:t her medh ödmükeligen förnimma Att han Sal: i Gudj afsomp:[ned] [...] begärade han af sin Berdberare b:d Mr Marcus, att han skulle läsa Vthi hans böcker för honom, Och antwardade sigh medh lijf och siel Vthi Gudh thens Alzmechtigestes händer och wilie, och så hugneligh Vpgaf sin Ande, att iagh i alle mine bedröfwede lijfz dagar hafr att hugna migh vidh," Ebba Stenbock to Queen Katarina, Castle of Turku, 5 June 1597, Kopiokirja 1592–1601 ("Copy-book 1592–1601"), pp. 131–32, Kansallisarkisto (The National Archives of Finland, Helsinki, Finland). On speculation in connection with Klas Fleming's death, see Anu Lahtinen, *Sopeutuvat, neuvottelevat, kapinalliset: Naiset toimijoina Flemingin sukupiirissä 1470–1620*, (Bibliotheca Historica) 108 (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 73–75.

26 Oftestad, "Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife," pp. 115–17.

27 Anu Lahtinen, "'There's No Friend like a Sister': Sisterly Relations and the Rhetoric of Sisterhood in the Correspondence of the Aristocratic Stenbock Sisters," in *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (2007), pp. 194–95.

political power struggles of the time, and it was important to provide the powerful family members with an account as soon as possible.

As was previously mentioned, Otfried Czaika convincingly argues in this volume that according to the Lutheran funeral sermons, no one died unprepared.<sup>28</sup> This idea seems to be present also in the funeral sermon of Countess Elena Bielke (1592–1651), who drowned in 1651 in a shipwreck shortly after she and her party had sailed off from Stockholm. Even four noble young girls, who had been Elena's companions and were educated by her and other elderly female relatives, drowned when the storm wind hit their vessel (Sw. *en Jacht*).<sup>29</sup> Luckily, argued the author of Countess Elena's funeral sermon, these women had prepared their souls (better than their vessel, it seems). The sermon describes, among other things, the pious prayers and songs that had taken place before the ship had embarked on its journey. These songs were typical precautions for people sailing on the troubled waters of the time.<sup>30</sup>

[...] when it comes to this late lamented Countess's mortal demise from this world, the late lamented Lady had left for and aimed at Norrnäs and Säby, leaving on 17 August the previous year 1651. The very day she and her company (however after saying prayers at dinner time) sailed at night on a yacht, but were hindered by rain and contrary wind and could not make it further off the Customs House at Blockhusudden [at Djurgården outside Stockholm]. The day after, on 18 August, they continued their journey, and after the morning prayers, held by the Court Preacher, including a Sermon and Songs, they went on singing many devout and pious psalms; the late lamented Countess especially entrusted herself to God and under His protection with the Psalm taken from Psalm 31 of David: In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed etc. Seconds later came a gust of wind, and at that very moment the yacht was overturned, so that she along with four young noble maidens in great distress had to part hence.<sup>31</sup>

28 See Otfried Czaika's chapter in this volume.

29 See *personalia* of the members of the Fleming family in Skoklostersamlingen I:74, RA; Olavus Laurelius, *Christelighe Lijkpredikningar* (Västerås, 1656), pp. 196–203 (page numbers according to those written in the margins of the copy preserved at the Royal Library of Sweden); Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor med tillägg och rättelser* 2 (Stockholm, 1926), pp. 740 and 743; Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor med tillägg och rättelser*, 7 (Stockholm, 1932), pp. 210–11.

30 See, for example, Simon Fischer, ed., "Henrik Normans resa till Erik XIV:s kröning 1561," *Historisk tidskrift* 5 (1885), pp. 259–96.

31 "[...] whad thenne Sal. Grefwinnans dödliga Affgåång ifrån thenna Werlden widhkommer / så hade then salige Frw sigh föresatt och ärnat then / 17. Augusti vthi nästförledne Åhr 1651.

The sermon text underlined that even before the fateful journey, the 59-year-old Countess had led a pious life, attended church frequently, and held prayers at home. It was even explicitly brought up that she had been preparing for her death all her life and was already looking forward to finding rest for her weary body in a grave, beside her late lamented husband – for a short while before the (according to the sermon) unquestionable resurrection.<sup>32</sup> Thus, even though her death was sudden, the Countess had taken every precaution for such a sudden demise. The autobiographical poems and Reformation guidebooks also make a point of preferring the hereafter and preparing for it.<sup>33</sup> In the Reformation period, it was all the more important to prepare beforehand: unlike during the Catholic period, there was no chance of being saved through suffering in purgatory or through posthumous commemoration by those left behind.<sup>34</sup>

### Preparing for a Violent Death

Sometimes the preparations had to be made in front of a violent death. This was the case with young Baron Johan Fleming, a young man in his early twenties, who became a casualty in the game of thrones of Sweden in November 1599. He was the son of the aforementioned late Baron Klas Fleming, who had been the Admiral and Steward of Finland and Livonia (then parts of the Kingdom of Sweden). Klas Fleming had also been the most vehement antagonist of

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*at förreesa til Nornäas och Säby / och förthenskull begaff sigh medh sitt Medhflyie på samma Dagh (doch effter hållen Böön för Middaghen) emot Afftonen på en Jacht vth på Wägen / men förhindrat aff Regn och Mootwäder / kom intet längre then Afftone än til Tullen widh Blockhuus Vdden. Dagen ther effter som war then 18. Augusti fulfölldes Reesan / och effter hållen aff Hoffpredikanten Morgonböön / medh läsande och siungande / continuerades Sångerna medh många gudeliga och andeliga Psalmer / i synnerheet befalte then salige Grefwinnan sigh Gudh i Händer / och vnder hans Beskydd och Beskärm / medh then Psalmen taghen aff then 31. Konung Davids Psalm: På tigh hoppas iagh HERre kär / Hielp at iagh ey på Skam kommer / etc. En stund ther effter kom en hastigh och brusande Wäderijling / och i stoor Hastigheet omstörte Jachten / så at hon medh fyra vnga Adelige Jungfrwer vthi en stoor Siönödh / sitt Afskeedh ifrån thenna Werlden tagha motte,” Laurelius, Christelige Lijkpredikningar, pp. 201–02.*

32 Laurelius, *Christelige Lijkpredikningar*, pp. 196–203.

33 Samuelson, “Att vinna Ärans krona”; Anu Lahtinen, “‘Noudatin vanhempieni tahtoa’: Omaelämäkerralliset kirjoitukset 1500–1600-lukujen Pohjolassa,” in *Historiallinen elämä: Biografia ja historiantutkimus*, eds. Heini Hakosalo, Seija Jalagin, Marianne Junila, and Heidi Kurvinen, (Historiallinen arkisto) 141 (Helsinki, 2014), pp. 290–313; Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife,” p. 124.

34 Helt, “Women, memory and will-making,” pp. 193–94.



the Swedish pretender to the throne, the aforementioned Duke Karl of Södermanland, uncle of the reigning King Sigismund. Fleming had supported the crowned King Sigismund at all costs. In 1599, his son, Johan Fleming, had to die to atone the deeds of his father.

Having resided in Poland for a long while, Johan Fleming came to Finland to help his imprisoned mother, Ebba Stenbock, and several sisters. He was almost accidentally drawn into the defence of the Castle of Turku against the troops of Duke Karl aiming to finally crush the supporters of King Sigismund in Finland. Although Johan Fleming's contribution was minor, his family name was poison to Duke Karl. Young Johan Fleming had to die; he was sentenced to death and executed at the Turku town square in November 1599, along with many other supporters of King Sigismund.<sup>35</sup>

A servant later wrote down a description of the last days of Johan Fleming, focusing on the efforts of the young aristocrat preparing for his untimely death. It was sent to the grieving mother, Ebba Stenbock, and was archived and later distributed by Johan's sister Katarina Fleming; clearly, the women were even in this case the primary persons to pass on the account and the tradition. While the account of the death of Johan Fleming is not a formal obituary, it is similar as the contemporary obituaries in the way how it comments on the dignified way of dying. Thus, it illustrates how important the proper process of preparing oneself was for the contemporaries. At first, Johan Fleming requested for reprieve but after it had been denied he accepted the inevitable. Resignation did not mean that he accepted the lawfulness of the sentence given by the earthly court; rather, it meant that he accepted his fate as decreed by God and attempted to focus on the remaining preparations.

When it came to preparing his soul, Johan Fleming reportedly sent for the vicar of the town of Turku,

so that he would be so kind and come on Saturday morning and listen to His Lordship's confession, and to give His Lordship the true passport, that is, the Body and Blood of Holy Christ, on his way to the hereafter where His Lordship now had to go [...].<sup>36</sup>

35 Eric Anthoni, "Johan Claesson Flemings död: En källkritisk studie," *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* 23 (1938), pp. 89–101.

36 "[A]tt han skulle göra wäl och om Lördagen bittida komma och höra H. H:s Skriftermål, och till att meddela H. Herd. det rätta wäge-passet, som war Christi helga Lekamen och blod, till den långa vägen som H. Herd. gå skulle [...]" Johan Bertilsson's account, "Convol. iv," *Acta Historica* 1599, Kansallisarkisto (The National Archives of Finland, Helsinki, Finland), published in Samuel Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter om namnkunniga och märkwärdiga swenska män*, 1:1 (Stockholm, 1770), p. 20.

Johan Fleming had to think of his eternal soul, but there were also other issues – the treatment of his corpse and the well-being of his mother and sisters, who were still imprisoned by Duke Karl and depended on the last male member of the family. Johan Fleming was concerned of his possibilities of ensuring, if not a beautiful death, at least some dignity in death. The immediate concern was that after execution by sword (see Illustration 6.1), his body or head might be displayed at some public place and his corpse be left for food for birds of prey.

Luckily, Johan Fleming managed to get a promise that “no spectacle” would be made of his corpse, so he could then focus on placing an order for his coffin. A special carpet was arranged to the scaffold by a noble female acquaintance. Johan Fleming also made sure that he had some money to give to the executioner so that the executioner could not claim Fleming’s clothes as a compensation for his work. Johan Fleming was afraid that the executioner would parade in his clothes during carnivalesque festivities, thus disgracing Fleming’s family and relatives.<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, the utmost concern and last request that he presented to his antagonists was that “the executioner would not lay



ILLUSTRATION 6.1

*Executioner's sword. According to the Swedish inscription on this sword, at display at The Royal Armoury of Stockholm, this sword was used to behead Johan Fleming in 1599*

The blade is from the sixteenth century, while the hilt is from the eighteenth century, and the inscription may be of that period as well. Livrustkammaren (The Royal Armoury), Stockholm, Licence CC BY SA. The picture is downloadable at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:B%C3%B6delssv%C3%A4rd\\_-\\_Livrustkammaren\\_-\\_39225.tif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:B%C3%B6delssv%C3%A4rd_-_Livrustkammaren_-_39225.tif). Last accessed 25 August 2017.

37 Gullan Gerward, *Majgrevefesten: En kulturhistorisk analys* (Stockholm, 1996), pp. 50–54.

his hands on my clothes, and that my head and my corpse would be saved from having to suffer an indignity after my death.”<sup>38</sup>

As Johan Fleming pointed out in a letter to his mother, his situation was typical for those who face difficult times: friends and helpers were hard to find. In troubled times, however, blood was thicker than water. It was the illegitimate daughter of Klas Fleming, Philippa, and her husband who both brought Johan Fleming food and drink during his imprisonment, and promised to do all they could to arrange an honourable funeral for him. Indeed, after a couple of days, he was buried in the Cathedral of Turku.<sup>39</sup>

This help was so much valued that Johan, praising the good will of his illegitimate half-sibling – the blood ties were not explicitly acknowledged in his letters – expressed his mother a last wish that she would do all she could make recompense the kindness of Philippa and her husband. Indeed, when Baroness Ebba was on her deathbed in 1614, she in her turn made her daughters promise that they would take care of Philippa and her family. This was precisely what the daughters did, referring to the obligation of the promise they had given at their mother’s deathbed. In his final letter to his mother, Johan Fleming was also speculating about the possibility that his illegitimate half-brother Olof Klasson could inherit the name and the coat of arms of the Fleming family as their family branch would otherwise become extinct on the sword side. Olof, however, was also sentenced to death and executed the same day with his noble half-brother.<sup>40</sup>

Along with assurances of his bravery in the face of death, Johan Fleming sent a ring to his mother saying that he was ready to die like an old and tired man. Like the last token and the last letter, the last greetings of Johan Fleming were to his mother, to be delivered by his faithful servant: “Tell her that I entrusted her to God Almighty, I hope He will be the consolation for my Heart’s Dear Mother with her cross.”<sup>41</sup> The property of those who were sentenced to death for treason was confiscated so there was not much else to be sent to the grieving mother; but even if there had been something, small personal belongings were important tokens of commemoration.

38 “[A]tt Bödelen icke måtte beställa något med mina kläder, och att med mitt hufwud eller kropp icke måtte blifwa brukat något spektakel efter min död.” Johan Bertilsson’s account, in Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter*, p. 27.

39 Johan Bertilsson’s account, in Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter*, pp. 15–19; about the burial, Reinhold Hausen, ed., *Bidrag till Åbo stads historia*, 1 (Helsinki 1884), p. 156.

40 Ibid. See also Lahtinen, “A Nobleman’s Death,” pp. 37–43.

41 Johan Bertilsson’s account, in Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter*, p. 29.

Praying continued when the sentenced walked to the scaffold, and the servant described Johan Fleming

consoling himself with the Word of God, and where the Priest could not console him, there he consoled the Priest, so that even though it was tragic and more than sorrowful that it would so happen, still the consolation that he received himself and gave to others was very dignifying to listen to. [...] And all whom he met and who saw him, he greeted with a happy tone and voice [...] so that all who heard it, cried and lamented because of his innocent death.<sup>42</sup>

What were the consoling words that a priest could offer to a person who was about to be executed? According to the service book, a person sentenced to death was guided to think of the crucified malefactors by the side of Jesus Christ, and how the other one was saved. The priest also placed emphasis on the fact that God Almighty had the power to change everything and that His will could still be that the malefactor would be saved; moreover, if an innocent was sentenced to death, God would see his innocence and save his soul.<sup>43</sup>

When Johan Fleming had come to the scaffold he was reported to have tried to give a speech to defend himself but was interrupted by the supporters of Duke Karl. After some arguing, according to the account, Johan Fleming and his opponents both agreed that it was best to leave the final judgement in God's hands. Johan Fleming said that he was himself confident that he was not going to face a final death but rather the eternal life; thus, he presented the Lutheran faith on salvation, a sign of a pious person facing his death. As final preparation, Johan Fleming told his servant to give some coins to the poor in accordance with the Christian tradition and went bravely to his death.<sup>44</sup> As I have argued in another context, the show of piety and self-command were as such resistance against the sentence: bearing the spectacle with fortitude could work against the intended defamation and question the righteousness

42 "[...] och tröstade sig med GUDs Ord [...] och hwad icke Prästen kunde trösta honom, så tröstade han Prästen, så att ändock det war bedröfwerligit och mer än sorgeligt, att så skulle tillgå, doch war hans tröst som han sig sjelf och andra med tröstade ganska hugnelig att höra uppå, [...] Och alla de honom mötte och sågo på honom, ropade han till med glad stämma och röst," Johan Bertilsson's account, in Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter*, p. 28.

43 An example of the guidelines for consoling a person waiting for execution, Kaisa Häkkinen, ed., *Codex Westh*, pp. 110–18.

44 Johan Bertilsson's account, in Loenbom, ed., *Anecdoter*, p. 28.

of the sentence, and the sentenced person could make himself look rather like an innocent saint, following the path of the Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Johan Fleming was not the only one who suffered a violent death during the turmoil of Swedish power struggles in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. In 1600, five aristocrats faced their death at scaffold in Linköping, more or less proven to have conspired against Duke Charles. They were likewise reported to have gone to meet their maker uttering pious psalms, giving fearless last speeches, and facing the final blow with grace.<sup>46</sup> Among the sentenced ones was Baron Gustav Banér (1547–1600, see Illustration 6.2), whose daughter later described to another sister, how her father did his best to prepare for his death and create a counter-narrative of commemoration against the accusations and the death sentence that had tainted his reputation. Gustav Banér is described spending the last days fondly embracing his wife, discussing the future of their children, reading the Psalms, especially verse 71:7, “I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge,” and finally being consoled by meeting several bishops. His daughter also recalled her father saying that he did not want his children to be ashamed of the name of his father. Neither, however, did he want them to seek for revenge; while he was convinced of his innocence, he left the final sentence in the hands of the God Almighty.<sup>47</sup>

Rings, pendants, and books given as remembrance by those sentenced to death by Duke Karl in the 1590s and 1600s survive to this day; among them are the pendant and some books given away by Baron Gustav Banér. Some items

45 Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual warrior, women and power in western culture* (Yale, 1998), p. 98; Lahtinen, “A Nobleman’s Death,” pp. 41–43; James M. Boyden, “The worst death becomes a good death: the passion of Don Rodrigo Calderón,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge 2000), pp. 259–65.

46 H. Almquist, “Sten Axelsson Banér,” in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* [hereafter *SBL*], 2 (Stockholm, 1920), p. 640; H. Almquist, “Gustav Axelsson Banér,” in *SBL* 2 (Stockholm, 1920), p. 647; Tor Berg, “Ture Bielke,” in *SBL* 4 (Stockholm, 1924), p. 210; Bo Eriksson Janbrink, “Erik Sparre,” in *SBL* 32, (Stockholm, 2003–06), p. 725.

47 “Jungfru Christina [*sic!* Anna] Banérs Skrifvelse til sin Syster, angående deras Faders Riksmarsken Gust. Banérs bedröfliga öden, ifrån Stångebro Slaget 1598 til dess afgång i Linköping 1600,” published in Bengt Bergius, ed., *Konung Carl den IX:des Rim-Chrönika, Samt Konung Gustaf Adolfs Påbegynte Chrönika, Egenhändigt af Högberämlte Konungar Författade; Jämte Bilagor Af 96 Bref och Handlingar til föregående Chrönikors och Tidehvarfs uplysning* (Stockholm 1759), pp. 348–65. About the identification of the author, see Sven Ulric Palme, “Två berättande källor om Linköpings riksdag,” *Historisk Tidskrift* 56 (1936), pp. 280–93. On the number of the psalm, see C.M. Stenbock, “En klagelig dag,” *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 18 (1916) pp. 237–38.



ILLUSTRATION 6.2 *Baron Gustav Banér (1547–1600) preparing for his death in Linköping, according to a nineteenth-century romantic Finnish painter, Robert Wilhelm Ekman (1808–73)*  
Laukko Historicum, by courtesy of Liisa Lagerstam, 2017.

were to be sent to family members who could not be present during the final days. In the prayer book, Gustav Banér wrote notes on his sorrowful death.<sup>48</sup> These remembrances, along with personal letters and final words to family members, allowed more private and devoted remembrance of the sentenced whose image in public memory was tainted by the death sentence for treason. Even the right to spend the final moments together with family members was a valuable moment to cherish afterwards. When documenting the last days of her father, Anna Banér put emphasis on the tender embraces and tears of her parents as they tried to give courage to each other, and their gratefulness for having been able to meet during the imprisonment. The account ends in a final tragedy, however, when the wives were prevented from following their

48 Stenbock, “En klagelig dag,” pp. 229–38.

husbands to the scaffold; it can be supposed that the cries of wives and children would not have benefited the political agenda of Duke Karl.<sup>49</sup>

The descriptions of the final moments of Johan Fleming, Hogenskild Bielke, and Gustav Banér were certainly based on what had been seen by eye-witnesses. At the same time, the account was also a narrated interpretation and, as such, very similar to other accounts from other parts of Europe, such as the account of the final days of the Spanish aristocrat Don Rodrigo Calderón in the 1620s. His story also went on from the resignation of a sentenced aristocrat to his way to the scaffold, from the description of the weeping audience to the final moments of bravery.<sup>50</sup> The cause for the similarities must be both by common understanding of how one should prepare for one's death and how these preparations should be described. The accounts then served several purposes: it was a testimony of how an aristocrat's preparations for death presented his piety, his bravery, and his innocence – and his dedication to his family and their survival. According to the account, he went to meet his Maker after having done what he could for the best for his family and dependents.

### Conclusion: Pious and Mundane Agendas

For the early modern nobility, accounts of preparations for death were, for sure, ways to communicate devotion and set examples of pious last moments. Rhetorically speaking, the earthly world was referred to as the valley of misery. Worldly fortunes were fickle and for a devout person, it was good to leave this life for eternal joy, as the way had already been prepared by pious life, as in the case of Elena Bielke.

However, one could not leave the world without giving some thought to those left behind. Some plans and preparations were made years earlier, in last wills or via attempts to follow a pious lifestyle. In some cases, however, plans were altered quickly and a *mors beata* had to be improvised as well as one could in suddenly emerging circumstances. The future of the children or siblings had to be thought of, and it was a great consolation if the closest family members had the chance to spend the last moments together. Either way, there were economic matters to be settled, tokens to be given as final greetings from the dying person; and one could not just leave without searching for

49 "Jungfru Christina [*sic!* Anna] Banérs Skrifwelse," pp. 280–93; Anne Banér and Eva Sparre, eds., *Fasans tider: Historia och öden kring Linköpings blodbad år 1600* (Linköping 2000), pp. 82–84.

50 Boyden, "The worst death becomes a good death," pp. 240–65.

some consolation of self-defence, as was the case of the Swedish aristocrats, already facing the scaffold. Written accounts served also as political assets for family members, often female relatives, who were left behind to defend and cherish the honour of the family.

As described above, the accounts of preparation could be formulated to actively defend the reputation and image of the deceased. The posthumous reputation had consequences for those left behind, especially when they were aristocrats whose every step was scrutinised by their peers. It was emotionally important for grieving family members to have a worthy memory of the deceased, such as the memory of the last moments of Klas Fleming, his son Johan Fleming, or Gustav Banér. These memories were also something that could be used for political purposes, to support family traditions, and to question the prevailing interpretations. While *personalia* and other accounts focused on the preparations for afterlife, more attention should be paid to the worldly agendas that were also promoted under cover of devotion.



# Dying Unprepared in Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons

Otfried Czaika

## Introduction

Since the first half of the sixteenth century, Sweden was *de facto* and since 1593 *de jure* a Lutheran country. In spite of this, Lutheran funeral sermon appeared as a genre quite late, around 1600.<sup>1</sup> During the following century, we are able

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- 1 Otfried Czaika, "Die Anfänge der gedruckten Leichenpredigt im schwedischen Reich," in *Kommunikationsstrukturen im europäischen Luthertum der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Wolfgang Sommer, (Die lutherische Kirche: Geschichte und Gestalten) 23 (Gütersloh, 2005), pp. 135–52; Otfried Czaika, "Andlighet och genealogi: Den tryckta likpredikan i Sverige," *Släkt och Hävd* 2004:1, pp. 29–59. On the changes related to the preparation for death between the Late Middle Ages and the Age of Reformation, see the studies of Fallberg Sundmark and Reinis: Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Skellefteå, 2008); Austrä Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Aldershot, 2007); Volker Leppin, "Preparing for Death: From the Late mediaeval ars moriendi to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon," in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jan Øygarden Flæten, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 27 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9–24; Jan Cemper-Kiesslich and Fabian Kanz, "Ein Begräbnis erster Klasse? Forensisch-anthropologisch/archäologische Betrachtungen zu Sterben und Tod im Mittelalter," in *Welterfahrung und Welterschließung im Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Anna Kathrin Bleuler, (Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Mittelalter) 5 (Heidelberg, 2016), pp. 305–20; Horst Schmidt-Grave, *Leichenreden und Leichenpredigten Tübinger Professoren (1550–1750): Untersuchungen zur biographischen Geschichtsschreibung in der frühen Neuzeit*, (Contubernium) 6 (Tübingen, 1974), pp. 35–39. For his dissertation, Göran Stenberg researched the rhetorical structure of funeral sermons from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Sweden: Göran Stenberg, *Döden diktar: En studie av likpredikningar och gravtal från 1600- och 1700-talen* (Stockholm, 1998). Olavi Rimpiläinen discussed funeral traditions in Finland and the history of the Finnish funeral sermon in the seventeenth century: Olavi Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö Suomessa ennen isovihaa*, (SKHS:n toimituksia) 84 (Helsinki, 1971); Olavi Rimpiläinen, *Suomalainen hautauspuhe puhdasoppisuuden aikana*, (Suomalaisen teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja) 88 (Helsinki, 1973); Otfried Czaika, "The Experience of Female Readers in Sweden around 1600: Evidence Collected from Funeral Sermons," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 107 (2016), pp. 243–66.

to observe how the number of printed funeral sermons in the Swedish Empire grew rapidly. Until 1650, around 700 death sermons and other sepulchral texts were printed in Sweden, not counting those some hundred sermons or related genres such as academic *programma exequiale*<sup>2</sup> or *epicedia*<sup>3</sup> and the sepulchral texts published in conjunction with Gustav II Adolf's (r. 1611–32) death in 1632.<sup>4</sup> My research covers not only the collections held by the major libraries in Sweden and Finland as, e.g. Stockholm, Uppsala, Lund, Gothenburg, and Helsinki but also minor holdings as, e.g. the collections in Skokloster Castle and the city libraries of Linköping, Skara, Östersund, and Växjö and the Libraries of Åbo Akademi (in Turku, Finland) and the University of Turku, Finland.<sup>5</sup>

Funeral sermons provide us with a rare glimpse into early modern lives. The *personalia* which usually follow the homiletic parts of a death sermon contain plentiful facts about the deceased's life, e.g., religious and spiritual practices, demographic and genealogical information, or medicinal records.<sup>6</sup> Last but

2 I.e. texts related to a funeral for a student or academic teacher.

3 I.e. poetic texts for a funeral usually written in Latin or Greek.

4 As a result of a post-doc project funded by the *Finnish Cultural Foundation* (*Suomen kulttuurirahasto*) 2002–05, I was able to collect bibliographical data for all funeral sermons printed in early modern Sweden between 1598 (the year the first Swedish funeral sermon was printed) and 1650. I would like to express my gratefulness to the Finnish Cultural Foundation for its generosity.

5 Some early modern funeral sermons from Sweden can be accessed with bibliographical data in Jan Drees' works on early modern Swedish prints and in Allan Ranius' bibliography on prints published in Linköping: Jan Drees, *Die soziale Funktion der Gelegenheitsdichtung: Studien zur deutschsprachigen Gelegenheitsdichtung in Stockholm zwischen 1613 und 1719* (Stockholm, 1986); Jan Drees, *Deutschsprachige Gelegenheitsdichtung in Stockholm und Uppsala zwischen 1613 und 1719: Bibliographie der Drucke nebst einem Inventar der in ihnen verwendeten dekorativen Druckstöcke*, (*Acta Bibliothecae Regiae Stockholmiensis*) 56 (Stockholm, 1995); Allan Ranius, *Biographica minora: Förteckning över personverser och likpredikningar tryckta i Linköping 1636–1700* (Linköping, 1987). The most comprehensive bibliography of early modern sermons from Sweden is still Johan Christopher Stricker, *Försök til et swenskt homiletiskt bibliotek* (Stockholm, 1767). This bibliography contains funeral sermons as well. A comparison with the material I have collected from Swedish and Finnish libraries and archives shows however that Stricker has registered less than 50 per cent of the printed funeral sermons from the period 1598–1650. More than forty years ago Uwe Bredehorn pointed out that library collections containing funeral sermons are not – or just partly – catalogued. This is still true for many libraries – not only in Scandinavia. Uwe Bredehorn, "Leichenpredigten aus bibliothekarischer Sicht," in *Leichenpredigten als Quelle historischer Wissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Lenz (Cologne, 1975), pp. 209–33.

6 Rudolf Lenz, *Leichenpredigten, eine Bestandsaufnahme: Bibliographie und Ergebnisse einer Umfrage*, (Marburger Personalschriften-Forschung) 3 (Marburg an der Lahn, 1980), pp. vii–xvi; Ingomar Bog, "Die Leichenpredigt als Quelle der geschichtlichen Sozialwissenschaften:

not least, funeral sermons are able to illustrate how Everyman and Everywoman were prepared for death.

Making a confession is one of the most vital parts of early modern death culture. The soul that has confessed its sins is able to move forward, from this life to another. The confession takes normally place on the deathbed and is interwoven with, e.g., partaking of the sacrament of Lord's Supper, praying and singing. As confession of sins has such an important place in the early modern *ars moriendi*,<sup>7</sup> I would like to begin this article with a confession by my own. Preparing not for death but for this study, I got more and more convinced about that nobody died unprepared in early modern Sweden. At least my sources, printed funeral sermons from seventeenth-century Sweden, do not really provide us with evidence of the unprepared death. Could it really be true that no one died unprepared in Sweden? And how could I suggest the heading of this article when in fact nobody died unprepared? Did the situation in Sweden really differ from the one Rudolf Mohr described some decades ago in his study *Der unverhoffte Tod* (The Unexpected Death)?<sup>8</sup>

Was there really nobody in Sweden who was suddenly overtaken by death? No, that is not my point! In Sweden as elsewhere people just passed away in the middle of life. Thus we may even find in Sweden people dying without the highly ritualised last moments on the deathbed, i.e., where the dying person was not able to follow the usual standards of the *ars moriendi*.

What the standards of well-dying are can be exemplified by the funeral sermon on the occasion of Anna Margareta Sture (1610–46), the wife of Count Johan [Axelsson] Oxenstierna (1611–57), who died in 1646.<sup>9</sup> When Anna Margareta felt that sickness, “the messenger of death,” approached, she accepted God's will, sought consolation in the scripture, and partook with “highest devotion” of the sacrament the day before she died. After that she gladly said: “Now I am prepared both to live and to die.” During the last moments of Anna

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Untersuchungen zu Berufsweg, Unternehmung, Schicht und Status reichsstädtischen Bürgertums v. 16.-18. Jh.,” in *Leichenpredigten als Quelle historischer Wissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Lenz, (Cologne, 1975), pp. 146–65; Otto Döhner Jr., “Historisch-soziologische Aspekte des Krankheitsbegriffs und des Gesundheitsverhaltens im 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert (anhand von gedruckten Leichenpredigten),” in *ibid.*, pp. 442–69; Wolf-Dieter Müller-Jahncke, “Leichenpredigten als pharmaziehistorische Quellen,” in *ibid.*, pp. 470–91.

7 On this, see among others Mia Korpiola's chapter in the present volume.

8 Rudolf Mohr, *Der unverhoffte Tod: Theologie- und kulturgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu aussergewöhnlichen Todesfällen in Leichenpredigten* (Marburg an der Lahn, 1982).

9 On Sture and Oxenstierna, see Hans Gillingstam, “Sture (yngre ätten), släkt,” in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, 34 (Stockholm, 2013), p. 84; Hans Gillingstam, “Oxenstierna, släkt,” in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, 28 (Stockholm, 1992–94), p. 465.

Margareta Sture's life, when "the pain of death became almost unbearable," she turned her eyes and her hands to heaven speaking with Psalm 31: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth." With these words on her lips, she died.<sup>10</sup>

The funeral sermon on the occasion of Anna Margareta Sture presents the archetype of preparation for death in early modern Lutheranism. The narrative we meet in this sermon is only slightly changed in other funeral sermons. A perfect death contains the following elements of preparation:

- 1) Recognizing the own mortality
- 2) Accepting the burden, e.g., sickness or infirmity
- 3) Searching consolation in the Scripture and through partaking in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper
- 4) Confession of sins
- 5) Turning to God through, e.g., praying, singing, and reading
- 6) A last active turn to eternity by citing Psalm 31:5 or Luke 23:46 "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

These elements are often completed by the statement of the preacher that the dying person peacefully passed away or suffered a blessed death. This remark does partly serve as a summary of what I have described as 1–6. But it implies as well the view of a death with not too much pain and affliction as this could be considered as punishment or the devil's presence.

The vast majority of seventeenth-century funeral sermons in Sweden contain this narrative of the preparation on the deathbed. According to the evidence we are able to collect from funeral sermons, the final moments of life were highly ritualised. According to this ritual of preparation, the dying person

10 "När Gudh skickade H.G.N. dödzens Sänningsbud, sjukdomen haffwer stäldt sigh mächta toligh, altid tröstat sigh och trösta lätit med Gutzd faderlige wilie tilfridz, så at när H.G.N. medh största devotion och gudelighet, dagen för sin Dödh, hade begådt Herrans högwerdige Natward, sade medh stoor frimodigheet: Nu ähr Jagh wäll beredd både til at leffwa och dö. Tå dödz pijnan begynte bliffwa alt förswär, oplyfte sin ögon och sina händer, befalte sina Siäl Gudhi som henne giffwit hade, uthaff then 31. Konung Davidz Psalm, seyandes: Jag befaler min Anda i tina händer, tu haffwer migh förlöst, Herre tu trofaste Gudh," Petrus L. Brommius, *Christeligh TröstPredikning öffwer then Högwelborne Greffwes och Herres Her Johan Oxenstierna Axelssons [...] Gemahl. Then Högwelborne Greffwinna och Frw / Frw Anna Margaretha Sture [...] Hwilken then 26. Julii emillan 10. och 11. om Natten uthi Ofsnabrüg Saligh j Herranom affsompnade An. 1646 hållen ther samma städes then 20. August eiusdem anni [...]* [Funeral sermon on the occasion of Anna Margareta Sture's death] (Rinteln, 1646), p. 29.

was to accept the means of grace provided through the word and the sacrament. Furthermore, the soul was to actively open itself to both God's grace and the inevitable point of life.

Thus we could raise the question how a situation is handled if the preparation to death on the deathbed was not possible. Was the absence of the means of grace on the deathbed considered as a theological problem? What happened to the souls that died without that final turn to eternity? Was a sudden death without any preparation an indication of the repudiation of the dying person? Which strategies are used by the preacher to explain the absence of the final preparation?<sup>11</sup>

How this absence of the preparation for death or the absence of a "good death"<sup>12</sup> was handled in Swedish funeral sermons shall be explored using some examples: a person who drowned, soldiers who died on the battlefield, the death of young children, and a woman passing away in childbed with unborn twins in her womb.<sup>13</sup>

### The Presentation of the Unprepared Death in Funeral Sermons: Some Examples

Let us first turn to Andreas Magni Julinus's (d. 1674)<sup>14</sup> funeral sermon on the occasion of the death of Peder Laurentii. Peder Laurentii was a pastor in the Swedish province of Södermanland who went fishing after the service in church, on Friday 1 September 1648.<sup>15</sup> His dead body was discovered the next day in the lake nearby. Despite the unclear circumstances of his death which in some instances would have given rise to suspicions of suicide,<sup>16</sup> the preacher describes the event of Peder Laurentii's death *sine ira et studio*. The part of the

11 How e.g. a sudden death, unfinished business in life etc. could "shak[e] the social equilibrium" is discussed by Kirsi Kanerva's article in the present volume.

12 See Anu Lahtinen's chapter in the present volume.

13 Anu Lahtinen presents in her chapter in the present volume further examples for preparations for an unexpected or violent death.

14 Yrjö Kotivuori, "Anders Julinus," in *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852*, published online 2005 at <https://ylioppilasmatrikkeli.helsinki.fi/henkilo.php?id=896>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017.

15 Andreas Magni Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan [...] Vthöfwer then fordöm Wyrdighe, Hederlighe och Wällärde, H. Pedhers Laurentii [...] Saligha Lijks Begräfning: Hwilken hastigt och oförmodeligha [...] ifrå thenna Werlden, igenom then timeligha Dödeh skildes, then 1. Septembris, 1648. [...]* (Nyköping, 1649), pp. I III<sup>r</sup>–I IV<sup>r</sup>.

16 On this, see Riikka Miettinen's article in this volume. Cf. Mohr, *Der unverhoffte Tod*, pp. 59–96.

*personalia* which provides us with information about the pastor's death does not contain any emotions; it is in some way newspaper style. The preacher ends the sermon with addressing the listener or reader and expresses the wish that we may escape an unexpected death.<sup>17</sup> This could actually point to the fact that a death without preparation was considered as a theological problem. But I am not sure that this would be an appropriate or compulsory interpretation of the whole funeral sermon on Peder Laurentii in general or the *personalia*-parts in particular. Reading this funeral sermon with the attached *personalia*, we understand that the life of Peder Laurentii contained all the aspects of the blessed death on the deathbed:

1. Recognizing the Own Mortality

Peder Laurentii had experienced the mortality of mankind during his lifetime, his son having already died in Germany during the Thirty Years' War. Thus Peder Laurentii got comforted and lived in the hope that God would save the souls of the believers from eternal death.<sup>18</sup>

2. Accepting the Burden, for Example Illness or Infirmary.

Both Peder Laurentii and his wife had experienced severe sickness in their lives. They both had accepted this as their cross and Peder had comforted his wife with the example of Job. The same day when Peder Laurentii went fishing and drowned, his wife had thanked God for her recovery during the service. Thus illness, health, and death were strongly intertwined in the religious experiences of Peder Laurentii – just some hours before he died himself.<sup>19</sup>

17 "Gud, vår käre himmelske Fadher, hielpe oss vår Wandringz tijd igenom gå, i een san Troo, och dagelighit Lefwernes Bättring, så at wij frelste ifrå en hastigh och oförmodeligh Brådödh, måtte när Gudhi så täckes, döo salighe Menniskior, och få en frögdefull Upståndelse, thet höre Gudh igenom Jesum Christum wälsignat i Ewigheet, Amen," Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum*, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan, p. I IV<sup>v</sup>.

18 "I wiß Förtröstning, at Herren skal utthaga vår Siäl utu Dödhenom, vår Öghon ifrå Tårar, våra Fötter ifrå Fall, at wij skolom wandra för Herranom uthi the Lefwandes Lande och see hans goda uthi the Lefwandes Liuse," Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum*, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan, I III<sup>r</sup>.

19 "[...] uthan och medh bewekelighe Ord och andächtig Spräk tröstad sijn Hustro, och henne aldeles öfwertalat, och slå then öfwerflödande Sorgen utur Hiertat, säijandes med Job: Jagh ör naken kommen uthaff minne Moders Lijff; naken skal iagh åter fara tijt, Herren gaff och Herren togh, wälsignat wari Herrans Nampn [...] så tildrogh thet sigh på then 1. Septemb. förleden, som war en Fredagh, uppå samma Dag, som hans käre Hustro, effter sijn långligha Siukdom, lät i Församlingen göra för sigh Tacksäjelse, at hon war kommen så wijd til sijn Helsa, thet hon sachtelighen förmätte skrijda up uthi Herrans Huus," Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum*, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan, I III<sup>r</sup>.

3. Searching Consolation in the Scripture and through Partaking in the Sacrament of Lord's Supper

Although Peder Laurentii did not partake of the sacrament on his deathbed, he had attended – and probably ministered – a service at his day of death.<sup>20</sup>

4. Turning to God through, e.g., Praying, Singing, or Reading.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, we learn from the funeral sermon that Peder Laurentii had been guided through his entire life by the Word of God. As a child he had learned the catechism,<sup>22</sup> he held private services, prayers, and devotions with the people belonging to his household,<sup>23</sup> and he taught his children.<sup>24</sup> Although he had not the possibility of a final turn to God on his deathbed, his entire life contained this turn to the creator.

5. The only element of the preparation of death which is missing is the active turn to eternity by citing Psalm 31:5 or Luke 23:46. Peder Laurentii died alone, nobody heard what he may have said when he died, and the preacher did not speculate about this.

Furthermore, the preacher presented in his funeral sermon on the occasion of the death of Peder Laurentii a catalogue of the deceased's religious virtues. Thus, he proved once again that Peder participated in God's grace during his lifetime. Reading this funeral sermon on Peder Laurentii, we learn that preparing for death did not only happen in the very last minutes of life. Preparing for death shaped the entire existence of a Christian believer. Thus, preparations for death on the deathbed were a kind of summary of life. Even if a prepared death was not admeasured the dying person, the salvation was there in the

20 "At sedan han tillijka med församlingen, hafwer warit uthi Kyrkian, sijn Gudztjänst förrättadt, och uthi sitt Huus effter Måltiden sitt Folk sine Sysslor föresat," Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan*, I III<sup>r</sup>–I III<sup>v</sup>.

21 For the importance of devotional reading see Cornelia Niekus Moore, "Erbauungsliteratur als Gebrauchsliteratur für Frauen im 17. Jahrhundert: Leichenpredigten als Quelle weiblicher Lesegewohnheiten," in *Le livre religieux et ses pratiques/Der Umgang mit dem religiösen Buch*, eds. Hans Erich Bödeker, Gerald Chaix, and Patrice Veit, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte) 101 (Göttingen, 1991), pp. 291–315; Czaika, "The Experience of Female Readers."

22 "När han nu så wijdt kommen war, at han begynte lära tala, hafwa the hållit honom hemma i Huset, til at lära sijna Christendoms och Catechismi Stycken, ther medh at then rätta Gudz Kundskapen, til hans Wäsende och wilje," *ibid.*, pp. I I<sup>r</sup>.

23 "[...] hemma i Huset hölt Böön Affton och Morgon [...]," Julinus, *Poenitentiale Propheticum, Thet är: Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan*, p. I II<sup>v</sup>.

24 "Sijne Barn hafwer han upfödt som en troghen Fadher, i Herrans Fruchtan, lärt them straxt aff Barndomen sijna Christendoms stycken, läsa i Book och skrifwa," *ibid.*, p. I II<sup>v</sup>.

faith, God's grace, and a Christian lifestyle. Consequently, we can claim that even those who died a sudden, unprepared death were in fact prepared for death.

Let us turn to the second example, soldiers dying on the field of glory. Cornelius Marci, a pastor in Nürnberg, held a funeral sermon on the occasion of the death of the Estonian nobleman Claus Hastver, who died after having been severely wounded in a battle in Reichenschwang in Franconia, near Nürnberg in 1634.<sup>25</sup> In the very end of his sermon, Cornelius pointed towards what could be described as the central problem of the unprepared death: "A sudden death hurts pious Christians most." But he continued: "But, as the blessed Colonel has fought a good fight and deserved the Knight's Crown in the eternal live, we shall grant him honour and rest."<sup>26</sup>

Saying that, he recalled the central topic of the homiletic parts of his funeral sermon, an interpretation of 2 Tim. 4: 7–8:<sup>27</sup> "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Thus the religious motif of fight became the metaphor not only for the fight for righteousness but also the real fight on the battlefield.

In fact, Claus Hastver died on the battlefield, but he did not die totally unprepared. Firstly, his entire life was a fight and thus prepared him for dying: "As a Christian he fought spiritually, as a great warrior bodily," the preacher stated.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, he did not die immediately after being hit by a musket's bullet. Claus Hastver ended his life some hours after being shot and thus had the possibility to confess his sins and partake in the sacrament.<sup>29</sup> But others, for example the

25 Cornelius Marci, *Christlicher Ritter Kampff, Lauff vnd Cron [...] Zu schuldigem Ehrgedächtnus, Deß Wol=Edlen [...] Herrn Clausz Hastvern [...] Bey seiner Christlichen, Hochansehnlichen vnd Wol-Adelichen Leibbegängnus, [...] [Funeral sermon on the occasion of Claus Hastver's death]* (Reval, 1637). The date of Claus Hastver's death (12 September 1634) is not given in the funeral sermon, but is provided by: Friedrich Konrad Gadebusch, *Liefländische Bibliothek nach alphabetischer Ordnung 2* (Riga, 1777), p. 220.

26 Marci, *Christlicher Ritter Kampff, Lauff vnd Cron*, p. E I<sup>r</sup>: "Ein plötzlicher Fall thut frommen Christen am wehesten." But he continues: "Jedoch, weil der Herr Obriste seelig einen guten Kampff gekämpffet und die Ritter-Cron im ewigen Leben erlanget, sollen wir jhme die Ehr und Ruhe gönnen."

27 Marci, *Christlicher Ritter Kampff, Lauff vnd Cron*, titlepage, p. A II<sup>r</sup> et al.

28 "Er hat gestritten geistlich als ein Christ, und leiblich als ein Kriegsheld," Marci, *Christlicher Ritter Kampff, Lauff vnd Cron*, titlepage, p. D IV<sup>r</sup>.

29 "[...] daß er [...] durch einen Musqueten Schuß tödlich verwundet worden. Ob man nun woln verhofft, es möchte, nach Gottes Willen und Gedeyen, durch fleissige Cur sein Leben etwas gefristet werden können, welches wegen man ihn auff einem Wagen nacher Lauff geführet, hat er doch selbstens verspüret, daß die zeit seines Abschieds vorhanden, demnach sein höchstes verlangen getragen nach der Empfahung des H. Abendmahls, als eines Viatici und



officer Lorentz Grubbe, who died instantly after being hit by a cannonball at the battle of Leipzig the 23 October 1642, had no possibility to make this final turn to the eternal.<sup>30</sup> The Stralsundian preacher Theodor von Essen claims that Grubbe's office, his call as a *miles Christi* was a way of righteous living and thus preparing for death.<sup>31</sup> This was not only clarified for the reader in the entire funeral sermon but also at the very beginning of the sermon – on the title page: “The triumph of a Christian knight or funeral sermon on the great joy of the righteous and against the great dishonor and scandal of the condemned on the great day of the Lord.”<sup>32</sup>

Those examples of soldiers dying on the field of glory prove that what has been described earlier. Preparing on the deathbed was desirable, but not really needed as the entire life should be an *imitatio Christi*, including suffering<sup>33</sup> and preparing for the end of life. The preparation on the deathbed meant that the dying person accepted the final call to righteousness, resurrection, and

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*Zehrfennigs auff die Raise in das himmlische Vaterland. [...] Nachdem ihme [...] endlichen die tröstliche Absolution angekündet, und das H. Abendmahl, nach Einsetzung des HErrn gereicht worden, hat er seine Seel Gott befohlen [...]*, Marci, *Christlicher Ritter Kampff, Lauff vnd Cron*, pp. D III<sup>r</sup>–v.

- 30 “[...] darüber es sich zugetragen, daß er Anno 1642. den 23. Octobr, in der harten und blutigen Schlacht und bataille zu Leiptzig, durch einen unglücklichen CanonSchuß getroffen, und [...] also sein Leben mit grossem Ruhm und Ehre, seines Alters im 42. Jahre beschlossen,” Theodor von Essen, *Triumph Eines Christlichen Ritters, Oder Christliche Leichpredigt [...] Bey Christ-Adelicher Begräbnuß Des Weyland Wol-Edlen [...] Herrn Lorentz Grubben, Ihrer Königl. Maytt. zu Schwede, vnser Allernädigsten Königin vnd Frawen / Secretarij Status [...] Welcher A[n]no 1642. den 23. Octob. in der blutigen Schlacht für Leiptzig [...] gestorben [...] [Funeral sermon on the occasion of Lorentz Grube's death] (Stralsund, 1643), pp. E III<sup>r</sup>–v.*
- 31 “[...] und drüber unser Wolseeliger Herr Obrister, Ritterlich bis in den Todt gefochten. So wol auch wegen weyland Ihr Gestr. selbst eygener Person halber, in dem nicht alleine ihre leibliche Feinde erleget, die deroselben in alle Ewigkeit nichts mehr können angewinnen, besondern da sie nicht wahre Busse thun, werde sie am grossen Tage des Herrn mit ewiger Schmach und Schande für ihm stehen müssen: Besondern, was noch vielmehr ist, hat unser Wolseel. Herr Obrister auch allen seinen geistlichen Feinden in Christo unsern Herrn obsieget, in dem er die Sünde, Todt, Teuffel und Helle hat überwunden durch des Lambs Blut, das ist durch den Glauben an das rechte Lämblein Gottes Christum Jesum unsern Heyland, welcher Glaub der Sieg ist, wie geschrieben stehet,” von Essen, *Triumph Eines Christlichen Ritters*, p. A II<sup>v</sup>.
- 32 von Essen, *Triumph Eines Christlichen Ritters*, titlepage: “*Triumph eines christlichen Ritters oder Christliche Leichenpredigt von der grossen Frewdigkeit der Gerechten und hergegen grosser Schmach und Schande der Verdammten am grossen Tage des Herrn.*”
- 33 Thomas Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur: Lutherischer Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des Reformationsjahrhunderts*, (Spätmittelalter und Reformation, Neue Reihe) 29 (Tübingen, 2006), pp. 9–10; Ronald K. Rittgers, *The reformation of suffering: Pastoral theology and lay piety in late medieval and early modern Germany* (New York, 2012), pp. 7, 257, and *passim*.

eternity. The absence of this final acceptance was not a sort of weakness as the final call on the deathbed was just a summary of the call the Christian believer had heard during his or her life. Thus, the description of the deceased's life in the funeral sermons fills the function to prove that he or she had followed the call. This call was only partly a spiritual call; it was equally a call to a working life in society.

In my opinion, the funeral sermons from seventeenth-century Sweden exemplify in a very obvious manner that what the Swedish Luther-researcher Gustaf Wingren once called "*Luthers Lehre vom Beruf*." The word of God was not only preached in the Sunday-service. The entire life was a service for the next. Everyone who worked in society thus participated in the work of God, any kind of work was in fact Divine Service or "*Gottesdienst*." Thus, preparation on the deathbed became a summary of the life, but the absence of this summary was not considered as a major theological problem. The lifelong service under God's word and grace is the *leitmotif* of the Christian life and death described in the Lutheran funeral sermon. This service could be rendered as a priest, a soldier, a merchant, or as a housewife who gave birth to children, educated them, and kept the entire household.<sup>34</sup>

### What about Born and Unborn Children—and Their Mothers?

But what about those who could not yet provide their service to God? What is about children, especially young ones dying without being prepared to death? Did children in general have a possibility of preparing for death? Could it be that we are able to reach the unprepared death in funeral sermons given on the occasion of the death of children? Those questions shall be answered through a handful sermons held on the occasion of departed children.

Let us first turn to Laurentius Laurinus's (c. 1573–1655/56) funeral sermon on Maria Lothigia who died at the age of eight. The preacher interpreted Psalm 116 in this sermon, and he revealed that his choice of the passage from the Bible had to do with Maria's affection for this text.<sup>35</sup> Laurentius Laurinus told

34 Gustaf Wingren, *Luthers Lehre vom Beruf*, (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus) 10 (Munich, 1952); Regin Prenter, "Die göttliche Einsetzung des Predigtamtes und das allgemeine Priestertum," in *Theologie und Gottesdienst: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Regin Prenter, (Theologische Studien) 6 (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 207–21; Harald Goetz and Wilfried Härle, "Allgemeines Priestertum," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 27 (Berlin and New York, 1997), pp. 402–10.

35 Laurentius Laurinus, *Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan uthöfwer [...] M. Johannis Lothiggü [...] Dotter Maria Lothigia, Hwilken i Herranom affsomnade then 14. Aprlis Åhr 1647. och begroffz then 21. ejusdem, som war Fierdedag Påska, [...] Marc. 10. Låter Barnen komma til mig,*

furthermore that Maria read religious texts, e.g., the catechism, prayers, and hymns by herself and asked her father to explain that which she did not understand.<sup>36</sup> This, the preacher Laurentius Laurinus explained, was not uncommon among children. But he emphasised that Maria sought a deeper meaning and understanding of Psalm 116 on her own.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, we could say that Maria did the same as the adults did. Even though she did not belong to the working parts of the society, she was engaged in the most central aspect of life as she opened herself through her engagement in religious matters for God's word and grace. In addition, she took part in what was considered as crucial not only for the Christian believer but also for those living in early modern Sweden. Consequently, we can claim that Maria Lothigia was thereby prepared for death.

In fact, we can claim that at the age of eight, Maria Lothigia was already in a similar way prepared for death as adults were. But there is at least one important difference: the death of children was less ritualised than the death of adults. Other examples of even much younger children show that the description of the last moments is much shorter, sometimes it does not exist at all or the preacher comments just with some words that the child had a blessed death. That the last moments of children's life were less ritualised seems to be natural. For example, Herman Hinrichsson Wolff<sup>38</sup> and Margaretha Johansdotter<sup>39</sup> were about two years old at the time of their deaths, and

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*ty sådana hörer Gudz Rijke til [...]* (Linköping, 1647), p. B II<sup>v</sup>. For this funeral sermon on the occasion of Maria Lothigia's death see Czaika, "The Experience of Female Readers," p. 257.

36 "[...] att göra henne salig och delachtig aff then H. Anda, som i henne troon wärkade, hwilken troo then H. Ande meer och meer haffwer låtit tillwäxa genom Gudfruchtige Faders och Moders flitiga tillhandahållande til Gudz ord, then Christeliga Catechesin, Böner och Psalmer, thet hon såsom itt lydigt barn med lust och benägenheet lärde, icke allenest läsa, uthan ock frågade sin k. Fader, om förståndet och meeningen uthi thet hon siälf icke förstod, hwilket man sällan hos barnen finner [...]" Laurinus, *Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan uthöfwer [...]* M. Johannis Lothiggü [...] Dotter Maria Lothigia, p. B II<sup>v</sup>.

37 "I synnerhet haffwer hon, läsit ljetet för sin helsott then 116. Psal. och med betänckande sökt förståndet på thessa orden som wij nu förclarat och uttydt haffwom," Laurinus, *Een Christeligh Lijkpredikan uthöfwer [...]* M. Johannis Lothiggü [...] Dotter Maria Lothigia, p. B II<sup>v</sup>.

38 Samuel Benedictus Hamarinus, ΔΡΟΛΗΨΙΑ *Thet är, En Christeligh Lijk-Predikan [...]* Widh then lille Herman Hindrichsons Wolffz Begräffning, Som war then Ehreborne och Wälwijse, Stockholms Rådhamns, Hindrich Wolffz käre Son [...] Psalm. 127.4 Sij, Barn äro en Herrans gåfwa, och Lijffzfrucht är en skänck [...] (Stockholm, 1649), p. C III<sup>v</sup>.

39 Lars Olofsson Wallius, *In Iesu Nomine. Lars Oluffzsons Wallii Lijkpredickning [...]* hållen Uthöffuer, [...] Johan Christophersons [...] lille och käre Barns, Margreta Johans Dotters, salige Lijck, thet ther tå vthi stor Kyrkionne begroffs (Stockholm, 1620).

it is clear that they did not really have any possibility to follow the *ars moriendi* of their time.

Finally, we could claim that at least the premature death of young children is an unprepared death. This is correct if we claim that a prepared death needed the personal preparation including an intellectual understanding of life, faith, and death. But I would like to stress the fact that claiming this represents a (post-)modern and thus anachronistic view. The early modern period did not have the same understanding of individuality. As we have discussed above, the connection to one's neighbours was an important part of the prepared death. An adult person thus was preparing through his or her service for the next and direction to God. Thus, the collective played an important role for the prepared death.

For small children, the direction of these collective aspects existed in a reversed way: instead of the child, the collective guaranteed that death was prepared. From the funeral sermon that Samuel Benedictus Hamarinus (d. 1665), priest in Bromma near Stockholm and chairman of the ecclesiastical consistory in Stockholm,<sup>40</sup> held on the occasion of the death of two-year old Hermann Hinrichsson Wolff, we learn that the parents had fulfilled their parental call and responsibility through both baptism and a Christian education.<sup>41</sup> The family cared for the soul of young children. However, this collective aspect did not only include the parents and the household but also the larger collective. Baptism made the child to a child of God, a member of the Church, and a part of the *communio sanctorum*. That implied that smaller children did not prepare for death by themselves but that they were prepared by the society, the Church, and the members of a household respectively family. In other words, the parish and society replaced the believer's direction towards God, if the believer was a child who had very limited possibilities to prepare itself for death.

Trying to find somebody who died an unprepared death, I came across the funeral sermon Jonas Benedicti Rudberus (1594–1675) held on the occasion of the death of Margareta Hansdotter who died on 7 December 1624 in the parish of Åker in Uppland. Margareta died with her two unborn children in her womb.<sup>42</sup> If one died unprepared, we could assume unborn children

40 "Hammarinus, Samuel Benedicti," in *Svenskt biografiskt handlexikon* 1 (Stockholm, 1906), pp. 454–55.

41 "Genom hwilka föräldrats omsorgh, han strax effter födelsen är kommen til doop och Christendom, ther han hafwer iklädt sigh Christi Rättfärdigheet, och blefwen en Lemm uthi Gudz församling," Hamarinus, ΔΩΡΟΛΗΨΙΑ *Thet är, En Christeligh Lijk-Predikan*, p. C III<sup>v</sup>.

42 Jonas Benedicti Rudberus, *Feodvs Antiqvvm. Thet är En enfaldigh och kort Liik-Sermon* [...] Öfwer Then Gudhfruchtighe, Åhrerijke och Dygdesamma Hustrus och matronas H. Margareta Hans Dotters [...] Her Hans Olai Medelpadij, [...] Elskelige käre Hustrus Lijk. Hwilken S.

did.<sup>43</sup> They were not baptised and were thus captured by the original sin. They had never been confronted with the Word of God, neither they were able to confess sins or partake in the sacrament of Lord's Supper. The preacher interpreted in this sermon texts from the apocryphal book Jesus Sirach. In particular, he cites Sirach 14:19: "*Somlige döo, somlighe warda födde*," or in English "Some die, some may be born."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Jonas Benedicti Rudberus pointed to nature as God's creation and expressed the *vanitas* of everything living. "Tu Moste Döo" – "You have to die" implied that everything had to die. Death was a sign of the old man, Adam.<sup>45</sup> But in the same way as death ruled everything created, God's grace ruled through Jesus Christ.<sup>46</sup>

God's Grace and Salvation in Christ was even promised to the unborn and unbaptised children: the hour of death was in fact the moment of the new birth in Christ. This was not only true for the expecting mother, but also for her unborn children, the preacher claimed.<sup>47</sup> Jonas Benedicti Rudberus followed here the theology of such Wittenberg reformers as, for instance, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) and Martin Luther (1483–1546). Against the dogma of the Roman Church, the reformers from Wittenberg claimed that everything created, including unborn children, will be saved. The unborn children are however not only a part of God's creation, they are as well justified through the death of Christ and baptised by the Holy Spirit; furthermore, they are as well

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*Hustru i Herranom Christo igenom en swär barnebyrd, och thes häftigha qwaal, sampt medh twänne sine elsk. små foster, (vthi sine moders lekamen begrafne) saligen affsomnade then 7. Decembris* (Uppsala, 1625).

- 43 For this, see also Mia Korpiola's article in the present volume. Korpiola points out that "[i]n medieval and early modern Europe, preparing for childbirth often very concretely meant preparing for death [...]."
- 44 The 1611 King James version counts this citation from the Bible as Ecclesiasticus 14:18 and translates as: "[...] some fall, and some grow [...]," the online version at <http://www.king-jamesbibleonline.org/1611-Bible/book.php?book=Ecclesiasticus&chapter=14&verse=18>, accessed 25 Aug. 2017.
- 45 "[K]ommer han nu uthi thet andra stycket och framdragher sielfva orsaken til sådhana menniskiors dödligheet och förgängligheet, hwilken han sägher hafva sitt ursprung aff itt Gammalt förbund, hwiljet lijder, Tu måste döo. [...] Att wij alle så wäl som Adam för thetta bruttna förbundet skul äro komne under döden [...]," Rudberus, *Feodvs Antiqvvm: Thet är En enfaldigh och kort Liik-Sermon*, pp. E II<sup>r</sup>–v.
- 46 "Genom Adam kom synd, sorg, nödh oc död. Uthi Christo gifz lijf, fridh, glädie och frögdh," Rudberus, *Feodvs Antiqvvm: Thet är En enfaldigh och kort Liik-Sermon*, p. F III<sup>v</sup>.
- 47 "[...] Dödzens dagh är henne, och hennes Elskelige käre små foster bätter worden, än hennes och theras födhelses dagh, och någhon timeligh glädiestund. Ty dies mortis est natalis vitae aeter. etc. Dödzens dagh ör födelses daghen eller förste daghen til thet ewigha lijfwet," Rudberus, *Feodvs Antiqvvm: Thet är En enfaldigh och kort Liik-Sermon*, p. B II<sup>r</sup>.

blessed through the prayers of the parents.<sup>48</sup> As a result of that, unbaptised children were not to be buried outside the churchyard.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, Jonas Benedicti Rudberus' funeral sermon on the occasion of the death of Margareta Hansdotter and her unborn children illustrates Lutheranism's attitude to the salvation of unborn children as Barbara Duden has described it: "The baptism in utero and the emergency baptism at a birth were to a certain extent replaced through the prayers and the spiritual orientation of the mother."<sup>50</sup> That means that the mother's faith replaced the means of

48 "Denn er saget, Lasset die Kindlein etc. Er wird sie wenn er sie annimpt wol wissen zu teuffen und zuwaschen von allen sunden, mit seinem heiligen Geist [...]." "Obs aber kompt zur not, das wie sie jm nicht anders können zutragen, denn mit unserm Gebet, die wir doch gern woltenn, wens möglich were, auch Christo zutragen in der Tauff, so sollen wir doch wissen, das sie Christus annimpt (unser glaube sey wie schwach er sey) umb seiner zusagen willen, da er uns schweret, Wahrlich sage ich euch, Alles was jr bittet in meinem Namen etc. [...]. [Bugenhagen]." "Und wer will zweifeln, das die Kinder Jsrael, so vor dem achten tage unbeschnitten gestorben, durch jrer Eltern Gebet auff die verheissung, das er jr Gott hat sein wolt, selig worden sind, [Luther]." Johannes Bugenhagen & Martin Luther, *Der xxix. Psalm ausgelegt Durch Doctor Johan Bugenhagen Pomern. Darinnen auch von der Kinder Tauffe. Jtem von den vngeborn Kindern vnd von den Kindern die man nicht teuffen kan. Ein trost D. Martini Luthers für die Weibern welchen es vngerat gegangen ist mit Kinder geben*, (Wittenberg, 1542 [= VD16 ZV 2694]), pp. G IV<sup>v</sup>, H I<sup>r</sup>, and I III<sup>r</sup>. Luther's and Bugenhagen's treatise reveals by the way that Susan C. Karant-Nunn's statement on the issue of unbaptised children is not correct: "Unbaptized infants remained dangerous, even though Lutheran theologians were coming around to the view, espoused earlier by Calvinists, that the offspring of faithful Christians were included within the promises of God's grace to the faithful." Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Babies, Baptism, Bodies, Burials and Bliss: Ghost Stories and Their Rejection in the Late Sixteenth Century," in *Tod und Jenseits in der Schriftkultur der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Marion Kobelt-Groch and Cornelia Niekus-Moore, (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen) 119 (Wiesbaden, 2008), pp. 11–22, here pp. 13–14.

49 "Darumb sollen wir Christen die Kindlein die wir gern wollten teuffen, und können nicht (als die noch nicht geboren sind, und doch in Mutter leibe leben, oder sonst in der Geburt umbkommen) nicht begraben an andere örte, da man die Christen nicht hin begrebt." [Bugenhagen]. Bugenhagen & Luther, *Der xxix. Psalm ausgelegt*, H II<sup>r</sup>. Marion Kobelt-Groch comments this as follows: "Verglichen mit der katholischen Lehre vom wenig trostreichen Limbus und dem ganzen Aufwand, der mit den Totgeborenen im Kontext von Wallfahrten betrieben werden konnte, muten Bugenhagens und Luthers Ausführungen über den Verbleib und das Seelenheil ungetauft verstorbener Kinder geradezu versöhnlich an." Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Selig auch ohne Taufe? Gedruckte lutherische Leichenpredigten für ungetauft verstorbene Kinder des 16. Und 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Tod und Jenseits in der Schriftkultur der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Marion Kobelt-Groch and Cornelia Niekus-Moore, (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen) 119 (Wiesbaden, 2008), pp. 63–78, here p. 67.

50 Barbara Duden, "Zwischen 'wahrem Wissen' und Prophetie: Konzeptionen des Ungeborenen," in *Geschichte des Ungeborenen: Zur Erfahrungs- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Schwangerschaft, 17.-20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Barbara Duden, Jürgen Schlumbohm, and

grace the unborn children did not receive directly as God's gift, in particular baptism. Pregnant women were thereby prepared for death – their own or their children's – and comforted through the devotional literature of this time. Preparation and consolation are hence connected to each other through a reciprocal relationship. This issue is addressed, for example, in Martin Luther's tractate of consolation for pregnant women.<sup>51</sup> Even in Sweden, these issues were picked up as a central theme of the devotional literature of this time, e.g., in the *Book of Consolation for Pregnant Women* (*Enn Tröstbook för Haffuande Qúinnor*), published in 1564 by the Swedish Bishop Erik Falck of Linköping (ep. 1558–69),<sup>52</sup> or Johannes Habermann's (1516–90) *Prayer Book*<sup>53</sup> which was translated to Swedish first in 1572<sup>54</sup> and published over and over again in Sweden during the seventeenth century.<sup>55</sup>

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Patrice Veit, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte) 170 (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 11–48, here p. 36: “*Die Taufe in utero und die Nottaufer unter der Geburt wurden im Protestantismus gewissermaßen durch die Gebete und geistliche Ausrichtung der Mutter ersetzt.*” Cf. Ulrike Gleixner, “Todesangst und Gottergebenheit: Die Spiritualisierung von Geburt und Schwangerschaft im lutherischen Pietismus,” in *ibid.*, pp. 75–99. See as well: Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “Babies, Baptism, Bodies, Burials and Bliss,” p. 22. For the medieval and early modern discussions whether a fetus has to be considered as a human being or not see: Wolfgang P. Müller, *Die Abtreibung: Anfänge der Kriminalisierung 140–1650*, (Forschungen zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte und zur Kirchenrecht) 24 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2000). Müller points, e.g. out that the circumstance that a fetus did not have a baptismal name was used as an argument to deny that the unborn child should have the same juridical (and theological) value as other human beings., *ibid.*, p. 132 and *passim*.

- 51 Bugenhagen and Luther, *Der XXIX. Psalm ausgelegt*, I I<sup>v</sup>–I III<sup>v</sup> (= *Ein trost D. Martini Luthers für die Weibern welchen es vngerat gegangen ist mit Kinder geben* [= WA Schriften 53, pp. 203–04]). For this cf. Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther – Rebelle in einer Zeit des Umbruchs: Eine Biographie* (Munich, 2012), p. 334.
- 52 Erik Falck, “Enn Tröstbook för Haffuande Qúinnor [...]”, in *Fem källor från den svenska reformationstiden i Finland = Viisi Ruotsin reformaatioajan lähdettä Suomessa*, ed. Terhi Kiiskinen, (Suomen historian lähteitä) 9 (Helsinki, 2010), pp. 298–345.
- 53 The *editio princeps* of Habermann's Prayer book was published in 1567, Johann Habermann [Johannes Avenarius], *Christliche Gebet für alle Not vnd Stende der gantzen Christenheit* (1567), ed. Johann Anselm Steiger, (Doctrina et pietas, Abteilung 2) 4 (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 2009). On pregnant women, consolation, and death etc. see, pp. 200–07 and 228–31.
- 54 Johann Habermann [Johannes Avenarius], *Gudhelig Bööner och Tachsäyelser för alla Christenheetens Ständer och åliggande Nödher, samt Affton och Morgonsignelse [...]*, trans. Petrus Johannis Gothus, (Rostock, 1572 [= VD16 ZV 26286]).
- 55 Isak Collijn, *Sveriges bibliografi 1600-talet: Bidrag till en bibliografisk förteckning 1* (Uppsala, 1942), pp. 35–37; *Suomen kansallisbibliografia: Finlands nationalbibliografi = Finnische Nationalbibliographie: 1488–1700*, 2, eds. Tuija Laine and Rita Nyqvist (Helsinki, 1996), pp. 380–81.

In this respect, it is interesting that Jonas Benedicti Rudberus's funeral sermon does not contain a proper *personalia* part, which normally is situated in the end of a funeral sermon. Instead of a *personalia* part, the funeral sermon lets us know both on the title page and in the introduction that "our blessed sister [...], godly and virtuous matron, the honorable wife of Hans Olai Medelpadius" had died. Thus the entire sermon has a clear *leitmotif*: the blessed mother's faith made salvation of the unborn children possible. Through the mother, the unborn children were prepared for death already in the mother's womb and through the mother's faith, the children were awaiting resurrection on the day of judgement. As Rudberus preached: "and [we will] on the Day of the Lord, together with our blessed sister and her two blessed and healthy small fetuses, who were buried in their own mother's body, resurrect to the eternal life's resurrection."<sup>56</sup> Hence this funeral sermon expresses both the dogmatic of Lutheranism and the confessional culture attached to this dogmatic: contrary to early modern Catholicism, there is no *limbus parvulorum* where unborn children flowed between heaven, purgatory, and hell.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

The examples discussed above make it possible to collect some evidence how people in early modern Sweden could prepare for death – those who were suffering a sudden death and those who were dying on their deathbed and had

56 Rudberus, *Feodvs Antiqvvm: Thet är En enfaldigh och kort Liik-Sermon*, p. F IIIv: "[...] och på then ytersta daghen, med thenna vår S. Syster, samt medh the twänne Salige och welbehåln små fostren, i sine moders egen lekamen begrafne, upstå till ewigha lifzens upståndelse."

57 Henryk Anzulewicz, "Perspektive und Raumvorstellung in den Frühwerken des Albertus Magnus," in *Raum und Raumvorstellungen im Mittelalter*, eds. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, (Miscellanea Mediaevalia) 25 (Berlin and New York, 1998), pp. 249–85, here pp. 281–83. How the confessionalised Catholic theology and the Catholic laity dealt with the problem of stillborn unbaptised children is discussed by Eva Labouvie, "'Sanc-tuaires à répit': Zur Wiedererweckung toter Neugeborener, zur Erinnerungskultur und zur Jenseitsvorstellung im katholischen Milieu," in *Tod und Jenseits in der Schriftkultur der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Marion Kobelt-Groch and Cornelia Niekus-Moore, (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen) 119 (Wiesbaden, 2008), pp. 78–96. See as well: Michael Prosser, "Vorstellungen über die Seelenexistenz ungetaufter Kinder in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: Schriftdokumente zu Theorie und Praxis," in *Tod und Jenseits in der Schriftkultur der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Marion Kobelt-Groch and Cornelia Niekus-Moore, (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen) 119 (Wiesbaden, 2008), pp. 183–99; Peter Marshall, "After Purgatory: Death and Remembrance in the Reformation World," in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jan Øygarden Flåten, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 27 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 25–44.



time for the final preparations. The following aspects of the prepared death are normally described as the means of grace in early modern Lutheranism – and we find all those as well in the Christian life which is in its entirety a preparation for the meeting with death and the hope of resurrection:

- 1) The Lord's supper
- 2) Baptism
- 3) Confession of sins
- 4) The Word of God

Funeral sermons highlighted the Lutheran confessional culture<sup>58</sup> which was expressed in the two respectively three sacraments of Lutheranism, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession of Sins. In addition to these, the word of God served as a quasi-sacrament. These four elements were present in preparations for death, regardless whether they occurred on the deathbed or during lifetime. However, the difference between late-medieval Roman and early-modern, confessionalised Lutheran preparation for death is more than clear: While medieval death preparation includes intercessional functions and refers to a *meritum*-thinking,<sup>59</sup> the deeds of a believer presented in early modern Swedish funeral sermons do not have this function: they show – in contrary to ideas of medieval theology and piety – that the believer possesses the faith as a God-given gift, through the word and the sacraments. Thus the early modern Swedish funeral sermons follow in fact the intention of Martin Luther, who claimed that a funeral sermon should not praise the deceased, but God.<sup>60</sup>

The evidence we are able to collect from early modern Swedish funeral sermons shows that nobody died unprepared because everyone – at least

58 With this, I resume Thomas Kaufmann's theory of "confessional culture" (*Konfessionskultur*), see Thomas Kaufmann, *Dreißigjähriger Krieg und Westfälischer Friede: Kirchengeschichtliche Studien zur lutherischen Konfessionskultur*, (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie) 104 (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 7–9 and *passim*; Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur*; Thomas Kaufmann, Anselm Schubert, and Kaspar von Greyerz, eds., *Frühneuzeitliche Konfessionskulturen: 1. Nachwuchstagung des VRG Wittenberg, 30.09.–02.10.2004*, (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte) 207 (Gütersloh, 2008). Cf. Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion und Kultur: Europa 1500–1800* (Göttingen, 2000).

59 See also Cindy Wood's and Dominika Burdzy's chapters in the present volume discussing late-medieval and early modern Catholic death preparations.

60 "Was das für den Charakter der Leichenpredigt bedeutet, hat Luther beispielhaft gezeigt. Nicht eine Laudatio des Verstorbenen, sondern das Lob Gottes ist ihre Aufgabe." Eberhard Winkler, *Die Leichenpredigt im Deutschen Luthertum bis Spener*, (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus) 10/XXIV (Munich, 1967), p. 31.

everyone who got a funeral sermon printed – partook in the means of grace of Lutheranism.

However, we should shortly return to the question raised in the beginning of this article: could it really be true that no one died unprepared in Sweden? Could it really be that printed Swedish funeral sermons only tell us the story of the prepared death?

In the beginning of my study on the unprepared death in Swedish funeral sermons, I recalled what I had read earlier in these texts. I remembered that most funeral sermons contain detailed descriptions about the last moments on the deathbed and that the absence of this description caused some need of explaining. Thus I assumed that the unprepared death, i.e., most often a sudden death, was considered as a theological problem. But, the examples which have been analyzed here do not provide any evidence for this assumption. Everyone who died in Sweden during the seventeenth century was in fact prepared for death. This is probably – at least partly – caused by the genre I have examined. Funeral sermons follow the traditional rhetoric, *De mortuis nil nisi bene*.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, we meet in the printed funeral sermons a specific class: burgers, clerks, clergymen, soldiers, and their families. This middle and upper class followed most likely the theory of lifetime preparation for death as we met it here very properly. Those who did not die prepared we would probably meet elsewhere. Such were, for example, witches and criminals rejecting the *vera doctrina* of Lutheranism and dying without confession.

The evidence collected from funeral sermons provides us with a very clear image. Everyone who got a funeral sermon printed after his or her death died prepared for it. This is not only a constructed image of death in early modern Sweden, but rather, it reflects how the confessional culture penetrated the majority of the Swedish society. It also demonstrates how religion shaped the entire lifecycle, from baptism to deathbed, from the cradle to the grave, from the mother's womb to the coffin.

61 Rudolf Lenz, *De mortuis nil nisi bene? Leichenpredigten als multidisziplinäre Quelle unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Historischen Familienforschung, der Bildungsgeschichte und der Literaturgeschichte*, (Marburger Personalschriften-Forschungen) 10 (Sigmaringen, 1990), pp. 7–9; Werner Friedrich Kümmel, “Der sanfte und selige Tod: Verklärung und Wirklichkeit des Sterbens im Spiegel lutherischer Leichenpredigten des 16. Bis 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Leichenpredigten als Quelle historischer Wissenschaften*, 3: *Eine internationale Fachkonferenz der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft*, ed. Rudolf Lenz (Marburg and Lahn, 1984), pp. 199–226.

# “Lord, have mercy on me”: Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden

*Riikka Miettinen*

## Introduction

In the night time in early June 1684, Reinholt Lorenz, a tree carrier in the Nacka ironworks in Svartlösa near Stockholm, drowned himself in a lake near his workplace. Reinholt, already an old man in his 70s, had for quite some time been low-spirited and had been kept watch over due to his previous attempts on his own life. A day before his demise, he had rushed to confess his great sins, including adultery and perjury, to the nearby chaplain who had absolved him and given him Holy Communion. Later, the chaplain recalled that Reinhold had taken to heart especially his sin of adultery that he had committed a long time ago. In his lifetime, Reinhold had been a devout churchgoer and received Communion the usual four times a year. The lower court of Svartlösa sentenced that Reinhold's corpse should be picked up from the lake by the executioner, taken to the woods and burnt there at the stake, as decreed for the sane suicides in the secular law in force at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Later, like in the case of most felonies, the Svea Court of Appeal reviewed the case, concluding that he had not been out of his mind and had killed himself because of his great gloom and bad conscience over his sins. The Court of Appeal revised the form of punishment, following the legal praxis of the time, and ordered that Reinhold was to be buried by the executioner instead of being cremated in the forest.<sup>2</sup>

1 Uppsala landsarkivet (Provincial Archives of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden) [hereafter ULA], Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684.

2 Ibid. and Riksarkivet (RA, National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden), Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar, Juridica I, Becchius-Palmcrantz' juridiska samlingar, 5, pp. 3–4. Svea Court of Appeal used its discretionary powers to mitigate the letter of the law (*leuteration*) and typically revised the forms of punishment for suicide; e.g. the sane suicides were almost without exception allowed burials conducted by the executioners in the woods or other hinterlands. Visible, e.g. in the Svea Court of Appeal sentence letters concerning suicides in ULA: Kortregister över Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar.

Like in most of Europe at the time,<sup>3</sup> secular law of the Swedish Realm punished suicides by deviant burials or disposals of their corpses. Self-killing was included in the chapter on felony of the King Christopher's Law of 1442,<sup>4</sup> in force until 1736.<sup>5</sup> According to the law, suspected suicides were to be investigated in the local district courts where a judge and 12 lay members of the court should determine the guilt. The penalty was directed at the corpse: the executioner was to handle the cadaver, transport it to the woods, and burn it there at the stake. However, if it was established that the accused had been insane, the corpse was exempted from the executioner's shameful treatment and could be interred somewhere outside the churchyard by the bereaved or others. In Sweden, unlike in many other regions,<sup>6</sup> the Crown could not in any case confiscate the assets of the deceased – instead, the law specifically mentioned that the kin were allowed to keep the inheritance.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside the secular authorities, the Church condemned self-killing as a breach of the commandment "Thou shall not kill." A good Christian was expected to endure any worldly or spiritual troubles and anxieties patiently, trusting in God and awaiting for one's natural, God-set demise.<sup>8</sup> Suicide was

- 3 See, e.g. Lieven Vandekerckhove, *On Punishment: The Confrontation of Suicide in Old-Europe*, trans. Tom Horan and Edmundo V. Guzman, (Samenleving Criminaliteit & Strafrechtspleging) 19 (Leuven, 2000) and Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* [orig. *Histoire du suicide: La société occidentale face à la mort volontaire*, 1995], trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 34–36.
- 4 Konung Cristoffers Landslag, henceforth King Christopher's Law of 1442, Chapter on Felony, 4, e.g. in Carl Johan Schlyter, ed., *Corpus iuris sueo-gotorum antique – Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar* 12 (Lund, 1869) pp. 300–01.
- 5 The King Christopher's Law was in use after its promulgation in 1442, and more widely since its printing and official ratification as the universal law of the Swedish Realm in 1608, until a new law, the Code of 1734, was finalised and came into effect in 1736, Gerhard Hafström, *De svenska rättskällornas historia* (Lund, 1965), pp. 95–100 and 175.
- 6 Confiscation of the heritable properties of suicides was allowed in certain cases, e.g., in the Holy Roman Empire and Denmark, see Ole Fenger, "Selvmord i kultur- og retshistorisk belysning," in *Skrifter utgivna af Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning grundat av Gustav och Carin Olin*, ed. Stig Jägerskiöld, (Rätthistoriska Studier) 11 (Stockholm, 1985), pp. 61–65 and David Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State in Early Modern Europe: A Bavarian Beacon* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 249. The secular laws or legal praxis allowed in certain cases confiscation or forfeiture of all or part of the suicide's possessions also, e.g., in England, parts of France, and Spain. See Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages 2: The curse on self-murder* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 63–83 and Vandekerckhove, *On Punishment*, pp. 95–120.
- 7 Schlyter, ed., King Christopher's Law of 1442, Chapter on Felony 4.
- 8 E.g. Petrus Pauli Gothus (1550–93), *Een rett Christeligh Onderwijsningh om heela Menniskionnes leffnat här på jordenne: huru hon skal retteligen igenom allahanda Plåghor, Pestilentxier*

considered a horrid sin that was taught to destine one's soul to hell without the possibility of salvation. The Lutheran Church of Sweden had continued the Catholic traditions, denying Christian burial with its ceremonies and final resting place in the church or churchyard from at least those suicides who had been of sound mind.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, like Reinhold, many other suicidal people encountered a moral and religious dilemma. Preserved sources describing the recent behaviour and talks of those who had committed suicide show that the troubled people had genuine concerns and serious matters to consider. Alongside the practical matters related to the execution of their suicide, including finding solitude and instruments, the people had, like everyone else preparing for death in the early modern religious setting, not only the future of their relatives but also their personal afterlife to worry about. For the suicidal, the anxiety as well as the preparations were unavoidably more challenging; self-killing was in no sense an ideal death, for the soul could not be prepared for afterlife properly. The person blatantly died in the very act of sinning, renouncing God's plan, and thus passed away by default typically unrepentant and could not in his lifetime reconcile his terrible sin. According to the mainstream views,<sup>10</sup> by killing themselves people risked their own salvation. Their choice also subjected their

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*och Dödzfaarar j Gudhi behållen warda alting döo och Gudz Rijke medh glädhie ärrffua. Petro.P.Gotho* (Stockholm, 1590).

- 9 Ecclesiastical regulations on the denial of burial for suicides in the Swedish Realm, see Olavi Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö Suomessa ennen isoavihaa*, (SKHS:n toimituksia) 84 (Helsinki, 1971), pp. 55–57, 158–60, and 275–77. The Church Ordinance of 1571, in force until 1686, literally denied the churchyard only from despaired and mentally sane, see Emil Färnström, ed., *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), p. 136. The Church Law of 1686 cleared up the jurisdictional conflict between the Church and the secular judicial authorities, and stated that the secular courts were to investigate and decide in the case of suicides. Kyrkolag 1686, Cap. XVIII § XII e.g. in Johan Schmedeman, ed., *Kongliga Stadgar, Förordningar, Bref och Resolutioner ifrån Åhr 1528 intil 1701 angående Justitiae och Executions Åhreder* (Stockholm, 1706), p. 1036. In general, Protestant denial of burial and views on self-killing were founded on the earlier Christian and Catholic tradition, see, e.g. Gary B. Ferngren, "The Ethics of Suicide in the Renaissance and Reformation," in *Suicide and Euthanasia: Historical and Contemporary Themes*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Dordrecht, 1989), pp. 162–66 and Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 72–74 and 127–30.
- 10 Lutheran view on suicide and the possibility of salvation, see, e.g. Bror Rudolf Hall, *Rudbeckii Kyrkodisciplin och vissa av dess förebilder* (Lund, 1928), pp. 71–72 and Erik H.C. Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation und Gegenreformation," in *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993*, eds. Wolfgang

families and kin to public trials during which the past, personality, relationships, and mental state of the deceased was scrutinised by questioning numerous witnesses. Moreover, the punishment of a disposal or burial outside the churchyard was public and manifested the exclusion of the person from the Christian community and afterlife, which no doubt could bring on grief and shame for the bereaved.

The article examines the ways people in early modern Sweden had for preparing themselves and others for suicide, with a particular focus on the suicides' religious crises and spiritual preparations. The first part discusses the types of religious crises suicidal people faced in the context of Lutheran Orthodoxy. The views related to the salvation of suicides' souls are examined in the second part, and the third part shows what these meant for the preparations for death among the suicidal. A look into the spiritual afflictions and anxiety among the suicides and the beliefs related to the suicides' souls is important as these experiences and views manifest the religious mentality of the era and contextualise the mindsets and the preparations of those aiming to die by their own hand. In the first parts, the article also offers new information from the context of early modern Sweden for the discussions about the connections between spiritual crises, religious despair, and suicide and about the beliefs on the fate of suicides in the afterlife that have been the topic of many historians of early modern suicide and religious mentality.<sup>11</sup> However, the preparations for death by the would-be suicide are the fresh aspect of this article as this has not yet been discussed or studied in the otherwise vast scholarly literature on

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Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte) 198 (Gütersloh, 1995), pp. 296–310.

- 11 Earlier works on the relationship between religious crises and despair and suicide, e.g. Jean Delumeau, *Sin and fear: The emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, Thirteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York, 1990); Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 50–69; Erik H.C. Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide: On the Reformation Origins of a Sociological Stereotype," in *Madness, Melancholy and the Limits of the Self*, eds. Andrew D. Weiner and Leonard V. Kaplan (Wisconsin, 1996), pp. 41–56; Julius Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience in America* (New York, 1994); Markus Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen: Selbstmord, Melancholia und Religion im Alten* (Zürich, 1985); Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirkville, 2001), pp. 254–63. Research on views and beliefs related to the afterlife of suicides, e.g. David Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead: Perceptions of Suicide in Early Modern Germany," in *Ehrkonzepte in der Frühen Neuzeit: Identitäten und Abgrenzungen*, eds. Sibylle Backmann, Hans-Jörg Kunast, Ann B. Tlusty, and Sabine Ullmann (Berlin, 1998), pp. 247–63; Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation," pp. 296–310; Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, *passim*.

the history of suicides. In what ways did people prepare themselves (and others) for their self-inflicted deaths? Also, did people contemplating suicide prepare for death and afterlife in a Christian manner, regardless of the persistent views on the exclusion from the Church and heaven of those who ended their lives through sin?

The material has been collected from a sample of 282 suicide cases<sup>12</sup> that were investigated mainly in the secular lower courts of the Swedish realm during the seventeenth century. Court records and other judicial documents are in practice the only preserved sources that include information of the past lives and backgrounds of the suicides. All recorded information of the deceased and the death was based on witness statements heard in the lower court sessions of the rural district courts or town courts, the first secular judicial instances dealing with suspected suicides. As the court investigations focused on questions of guilt, also the recent behaviour and preparations of the deceased were of interest. They could serve as aggravating pieces of evidence of suicidal intent as well as proof of the mental state, central for determining the appropriate form of punishment.

However, the informational content and value vary greatly in the documents. At times, the events of the days preceding the death have been included in the protocol in detail while occasionally the scribes have recorded information only about the behaviour and events further in the past or on an undefined occasion. As finding out the true course of events was central for establishing guilt, the courts could give a great deal of attention to details and clues that could be linked with such incidents. Without eyewitnesses and medical expertise, the classification of death rested largely upon circumstantial evidence provided by the locals. The majority of the records contain second- or third-hand accounts and detailed testimonies describing the behaviour and talks of the accused that refer to some form of planning and preparing for suicide.

The religious practice of the deceased during his lifetime and prior to his death was a matter of interest in the trials, and was questioned in order to establish the character of the accused. Especially past sins, “ungodly” ways of life, and negligence of religious worship were considered aggravating

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12 At least 224 were classified as suicides by the secular courts, the bishop's courts, or by other ecclesiastical actors while five are sentenced suicide attempts and the rest are cases in which suicide was suspected but for the lack of evidence or other reasons the case was acquitted. The sample has been collected from various archives and sources listed in the following footnote. The sample was collected for my PhD Thesis: Riikka Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Praxis in the Lower Courts* (Tampere, 2015).

circumstances, for such matters manifested that there was something morally wrong in the suspect and made sense of his or her abominable act. However, interestingly, many of the suicides were instead depicted as devout and even fervent Christians. Obviously, the witness statements must be treated with caution for the bereaved and others could colour, even exaggerate, hold back, and lie in their accounts. For example, the religiosity of the accused was in some cases clearly emphasised for argumentative and rhetorical reasons, for example in an attempt to claim that the death had been accidental for such an exemplary believer and churchgoer could not have committed such a deed.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, it can be assumed that many pieces of information are trustworthy, for example those provided by multiple witnesses, unbiased outsiders, and local officials. Also, it was not uncommon to recollect and quote talks of the accused which offer an indirect passage into the thinking and mindsets of the suicides. Although only a small portion of the records include information about the preparations for death in particular, it can be deduced that, in general, the large sample collected from various parts of the large Swedish realm sufficiently represents the wide range of arrangements that the suicides made in preparing for their demise.<sup>14</sup>

13 It is likely that there was a tendency to classify the obscure and suspicious deaths of the very devout, e.g. the clergy, as accidents. Previous research has noted also that the possible suicides of the higher estates were rather acquitted or classified as accidents in many places in early modern Europe. See, e.g. Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 296–97, 403–06, and 433; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 142–47. This can explain, for example, why the drowning of pastor Peder Laurentii, discussed in Otfried Czaika, "Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons," in this volume, was seemingly easily determined an accident.

14 Court records dealing with suicides were located mainly with the help of card-indexes: ULA: Kortregister över Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar and Kansallisarkisto (National Archives of Finland) [hereafter KA]: Tuomiokirjakortisto (Card index for the engrossed lower court records, covering rural regions of Southwestern Finland, Northern Ostrobothnia, parts of Karelia and Kexholm Province in the east). Lower court records preserved in RA: Svea hovrätts arkiv (SHA): Renoverade domböcker (Collection of engrossed lower court records): Gävleborgs län, Jämtlands län, Kopparbergs län, Stockholms län, Upplands län, Uppsala län, Västmanlands län, Västerbottens län, and Örebro län and KA: Renoverade domböcker (Collection of engrossed lower court records) [hereafter RT]. Information of certain cases of which the lower court records have not been preserved is based on Court of Appeal decisions and sentence letters (Svea hovrätts brev) preserved in ULA: Kopparbergs länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D IId; Västmanlands länsstyrelses arkiv D I; ULA: Örebro länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D Iqa. Cases have been also included from RA: Justitierevisionen: Åbo hovrätts arbetsberättelser 1665–67, 1669; RA:



## Religious Crises among Suicides in an Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy

The seventeenth century was a period of expansion for the Swedish Realm. At its peak as a Great Power in the mid-century, the large kingdom covered not only mainland Sweden and Finland but also parts of Norway, Karelia, the Baltic Countries, and Pomerania. The population increased significantly in the latter half of the century, and especially after the 1680s when the nearly constant warfare overseas ceased. However, the century ended with a crisis, as famines and epidemics related to the consecutive years of devastating crop failures touched Sweden since 1695, killing great shares of the population especially in Finland, Estonia, and Livonia.<sup>15</sup>

During this era Sweden was moving from an era of confessionalization to Lutheran Orthodoxy, resulting in the enforcement of strict religious obedience and severe official attitudes towards moral and religious violations. Natural calamities, wars, epidemics, and hardships were understood, or at least portrayed by the authorities, as punishments for individuals' sins. Crimes and sins provoked God's wrath that might fall not only on the perpetrator but also on others, especially if such behaviour was not punished.<sup>16</sup> A generally

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Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar. Juridica 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' juridiska samlingar, 5; RA: SHA Huvudarkivet B III b 1:2. Kriminella resolutioner 1695, the records of the bishop's court (chapter) of Uppsala (ULA: Uppsala domkapitel 1. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A 1:1–15) the sporadically preserved archives of the Turku Court of Appeal (Turun maakunta-arkisto/Provincial Archives of Turku: Turun hovioikeuden arkisto). Also, random cases presented in literature and various works of printed source collections have been included. Thus, the material serves only as a representative sample of suicides that took place in seventeenth-century Sweden.

- 15 Janken Myrdal, *Det svenska jordbrukets historia 2: Jordbruket under feodalismen: 1000–1700* (Stockholm, 1999), pp. 221–23 and 258–59; Nils Erik Villstrand, *Sveriges historia 1600–1721* (Stockholm, 2011), pp. 381–82. For the great famines in Sweden between 1695 and 1697, see Mirkka Lappalainen, "Death and Disease During the Great Finnish Famine 1695–1697," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39 (2014), pp. 425–47.
- 16 Mikko Juva, *Varsinais-Suomen seurakuntaelämä puhdasoppisuuden vuosisatoina (1600–1800)*, (*Varsinais-Suomen Historia*) 7:3–4 (Turku, 1955), pp. 74–84; Tyge Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague: Murdering to Die in the Eighteenth Century*, (*Studies in Central European Histories*) 55 (Leiden, 2012), pp. 100–01; Heikki Pihlajamäki, "Executor divinarum et suarum legum: Criminal Law and the Lutheran Reformation," in *Lutheran Reformation and the Law*, ed. Virpi Mäkinen, (*Medieval and Reformation Traditions*) 112 (Leiden, 2006), pp. 171–204; Kustaa H.J. Vilkkuna, "Jumala elä rankaise minua: Yksilöllisen subjektin synty," in *Siperiasta siirtoväkeen: Murrosaikoja ja käännekohtia Suomen historiassa*, ed. Heikki Roiko-Jokela (Jyväskylä, 1996), pp. 71–93.

pessimistic overtone – which placed emphasis on the rejection of the world, worldly burdens and miseries of life, the dangers of sinning, and desire of the heavenly afterlife – characterised the Swedish Lutheran discourse. At the same time, the importance of personal faith and devotion, remorse over one's sins, and diligent religious practice were emphasised. Pietism, slowly gaining more foothold in Sweden in the late seventeenth century, did not change this mentality.<sup>17</sup>

It has been argued that the more individualistic and less strongly integrated nature of Protestant societies and the theological tenets typical to most Protestant confessions, including the lack of institutional channels for the relief of guilt through rituals like penance, resulted in higher suicide rates among Protestants than among Catholics.<sup>18</sup> However, although the era's literature and accounts show a stronger perception of suicidal despair among evangelical Lutherans and some other Reformed sects,<sup>19</sup> the statistical data for the period

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- 17 Arne Jansson, *From swords to sorrow: Homicide and suicide in early modern Stockholm*, (Stockholm Studies in Economic History) 30 (Stockholm, 1998), pp. 36 and 63; Arne Jarrick, "Suicide – The Most and Least Human Deed," in *Only Human: Studies in the History of Conceptions of Man*, ed. Arne Jarrick, (Stockholm Studies in History) 61 (Stockholm, 2000), pp. 317–20. Such themes were highlighted in numerous religious writings, sermons, and songs published in Sweden, e.g. by Petrus Pauli Gothus (1550–93), Ericus Erici Sorolainen, Bishop of Turku (ep. 1583–1625), Olof Laurelius, Bishop of Västerås (ep. 1647–70), and Johannes Henrici Carlander (c. late 1610s–1686). E.g. broadsides *Twänne Andeliga Wijisor. Then Första. Ach hwad är Menniskian* (n.d.); *Twå sköna Andelig Wijisor. Then Första. Gudh nåde tigh Werld. Then Andra. Rööpa til Gudh min Siäl med Flijt* (Enköping, 1683).
  - 18 Emilé Durkheim, *Itsemurha: sosiologinen tutkimus* [orig. *Le Suicide, étude de sociologie*, 1897], trans. Seppo Randell (Helsinki, 1985), pp. 165–90; Henry Romille Fedden, *Suicide: a social and historical study* (Cheshire, 1938), pp. 157–58; Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*, pp. 166, 222, 243, and *passim*; Samuel Ernest Sprott, *The English Debate on Suicide: From Donne to Hume* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 29–54.
  - 19 Many early modern contemporary writers envisioned higher suicide rates especially among Puritans, Calvinists, and Lutherans. Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide," pp. 41–56; Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 10–11. See also Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," pp. 77–120 and Lederer, "Suicide in Early Modern Central Europe," pp. 33–46. Such opinions may represent propaganda rather than reality or even belief, as the connection between suicidality and religious denomination was a "politicised" issue in Europe in an era characterised by Catholic-Protestant rivalry and rivalry between competing forms of Protestantism. See, e.g. R.A. Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500–1830* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 301–12.

as yet offers no conclusive evidence that suicide was more endemic and prevalent among the Reformed in early modern Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, it has been interpreted that in many regions of early modern Europe the austere religious atmospheres in general increased the prevalence and experiences of spiritual anxiety and crises, religiously motivated melancholy, and morbid preoccupation with one's sinfulness and salvation, which could result in mounting suicidal tendency at least among religious individuals.<sup>21</sup> Preachers obsessively warned against sin, damnation, and Satanic forces. Fear of hell and anxiety over one's salvation no doubt distressed sensitive people in all religious sects. Both the Protestant and Catholic reform movements emphasised the inner person as the location of spiritual health, perhaps increasing the internalization of spirituality and guilt over sins. It is conceivable that such tendencies indeed augmented feelings of despair, individual guilt over one's sins, and the incidence of religiously motivated melancholy – which all at least the contemporaries did connect with suicidality.<sup>22</sup>

Such mental setting that accentuated the hereafter and laid guilt over hardships on one's sinning, alongside the recurring hardships of the era, could, of course, make death seem like a desired release. A number of suicides in the sample indeed appear to have endured some types of spiritual crises – connected to suicide at least in the trials but also typically explicitly by the deceased in his or her prior talks. Like Reinhold Lorenz, mentioned in the beginning of this article, at least eleven other suicides had experienced overbearing guilt over their committed or imaginary sins.<sup>23</sup> For example, in 1682 an old

20 Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 242–58; Lederer, “Suicide in Early Modern Central Europe,” pp. 39–40; Midelfort, “Religious Melancholy and Suicide,” pp. 41–46.

21 E.g. in the Zwinglian canton of Zurich, see Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*. Among Calvinists and Puritans, see Fedden, *Suicide*, pp. 157–58; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*; Sprott, *The English Debate on Suicide*, pp. 29–54.

22 Delumeau, *Sin and fear*, pp. 168–85, 523–54, and *passim*; Lederer, “The Dishonorable Dead,” pp. 352–53 and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 252–64. For fear of Hell or purgatory, see, e.g. Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: images of damnation and salvation in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. pp. 25–28, 44–46, and 101.

23 In chronological order: ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I: 2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv (KLHA) Serie IV A I: 2 and 7<sup>v</sup>–9, Mora 26 Aug. 1664; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I: 8, Frötuna 23 Feb. 1676; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164<sup>v</sup>–167, Sollefteå 5–6 July 1682; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218–20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II d: 7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 7a: 452–52<sup>v</sup>, Anundsjö 10 Feb. 1686; ULA: Örebro länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D

woman called Sara came to her pastor in despair and tears, telling him that she was such a great sinner that God could not forgive her, mentioning that she did not even expect Him to do so. Sara based her guilt on her youthful sexual relations with two men who were brothers, as well as claimed practice of witchcraft. After confessing she refused to take Communion and left, later strangling herself at home.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in 1683, an elderly man called Nils had before hanging himself told many of his household members and neighbours of his bad conscience over the great sins he had committed in his youth.<sup>25</sup> Before disappearing and shooting himself in Ulvila in 1695, Sigfred Michelsson had mentioned that due to his adultery of many years, he considered himself "to be a greater sinner than anyone else," and "that he could not be forgiven."<sup>26</sup> For some, the experiences of guilt, sinfulness, worthlessness, and ineligibility to join the heavenly afterlife were clearly delusional.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in their preparations for suicide some appear to have had very negative or at least mixed feelings on their eligibility for salvation, as the above cases show. It is noteworthy that it was precisely their guilt and experiences of personal sinfulness what they had been preoccupied with prior to their suicide. This also shows that they had not adopted the central ideas of the Reformation and the Lutheran *ordo salutis*, especially the doctrines of *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *solus Christus* based on which pardon, justification, and redemption were granted and accomplished through faith, God's mercy, and Christ alone or the notion of faith in God and remorse over one's sins as the means of grace.<sup>28</sup>

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I qa: 3, Örebro 22 June 1687; RA: SHA Upplands län 49b: 919<sup>v</sup>–22<sup>v</sup>, Nordinghundra 14 July 1689; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80<sup>v</sup>–82<sup>v</sup>, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo och Tuna n.d.1695; KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 210–20, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696; KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529–31<sup>v</sup>, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697. Many more were later interpreted to have killed themselves due to their guilty conscience although they had not, according to the records and witnesses, spoken of such feelings.

24 Sara had said to the priest that she felt herself as "*een så stoor Syndare, att Gudh henne intet förlåta kan, ej heller hafv någon förlåtelssse att wäntta*." RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164<sup>v</sup>–67, Sollefteå 5–6 July 1682.

25 RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218–20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683.

26 "[J]a wara större Syndare än någon annan," "*dhet honom intet kunde förlåtas*." KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7, p. 218, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696.

27 E.g. ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv Serie IV AI: 2, 7<sup>v</sup>–9, Mora 26 Aug 1664; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80<sup>v</sup>–82<sup>v</sup>, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo, and Tuna n.d.1695.

28 See also Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro: Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige* (Lund, 2002), p. 166 and *passim*; Bertil Nilsson, "Preparing for Death: Concluding Remarks," in this volume.

There were also other types of religious crises than suffering from guilt and questioning one's salvation. For example, Erich Andersson, a peasant who hung himself in Skedvi in 1672, had been so worried over his livelihood and the support of his family that he was unable to sleep and eat, and had complained to the pastor that no matter how much he went to church and practiced religion, God's word had no power or effect.<sup>29</sup> Quite comparably, in 1697 Erich Michellson had talked about the futility to seek cure for his gloominess and suicidal thoughts, and had said he considered himself unable to rectify or atone for in this world.<sup>30</sup> Before hanging himself, Hans Gabel had said that "because he considers himself having no luck in this world, only sheer misfortune, he has no longer the will to serve and even less to live."<sup>31</sup>

The cases are clear examples of people who had lost all hope. Losing hope was considered a blatant manifestation of despair, a terrible sin of mistrust in God that had for centuries been linked with the Devil and with suicides of mentally sane individuals. A despairing individual doubted God's power, benevolence, and mercy, gave up all hope, and believed that his deeds were beyond all pardon. It was typically considered that Satan tempted people to despair and that a person could fall into despair over hardships in his life or due to guilt over his sins. Such moments of spiritual darkness and despair were understood to hit people from time to time but these trials were to be endured and overcome with patience and faith; giving up and killing oneself (while sane) manifested the ultimate moral-religious failure.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, the condition of

29 Erich Andersson's worries were probably related to poor crops or other shortages, though such was not mentioned in the court records. Still, it is possible that his crop had failed as the decade, and the whole century, was characterised by recurrent crop failures. ULA: KLHA Serie III A 1: 15, 105–05<sup>v</sup>, Skedvi 25 Sept. 1672. Also, e.g. in Semminghundra in 1684, Charles Alexander de Chattillon had before shooting himself stated that all his devotion had merely been hypocrisy. The Court of Appeal considered it a clear sign of sanity, sentencing him for the executioner's treatment. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet, D II d: 7, Semminghundra 17 Sept. 1684.

30 KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529–31<sup>v</sup>, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

31 Translated quote from KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357–59, Rautu 31 July 1682.

32 Niels Hemmingsen, *Antidotum. Thet är: En saligh läkedom och tröst, emot then farligha och förgiftigha siälennes siukdom, som är misströst, eller förtwiflan om Gudz nådhe och syndernas förlåtelse* (Stockholm, 1608); Ferngren, "The Ethics of Suicide," pp. 163–66; Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, pp. 369–95; Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), pp. 18–59. For despair, the Devil, and suicides in Martin Luther's (1483–1546) view, see Luther's Large Catechism, e.g. seventeenth-century translation into Swedish *D. Martini Lutheri Catechismus 1667* [1529], pp. 204–05.

despair was a familiar concept and notion in seventeenth-century Sweden,<sup>33</sup> and repeatedly mentioned and referred to in the judicial documents.<sup>34</sup>

However, it must be pointed out that the same spiritual afflictions were not necessarily perceived as (the sin of) despair but could also be understood as products of insanity and/or demonic forces. In the suicide trials the very same feelings and expressions could be regarded as manifestations of a mental illness, melancholia, if the accused had been otherwise a devout Christian but had been acting in ways that were considered insane and/or his or her lament and worries were considered groundless or unnaturally prolonged.<sup>35</sup> This illness could manifest itself in religious form, as religious melancholy, characterised by excessive and delusional guilt over one's sins, doubts about one's salvation, or even perverted and excessive obsession with spiritual matters and religious practice.<sup>36</sup> Unlike the "despaired" suicides, they were interpreted to have still kept their faith in God but having acted while of unsound mind.

Also, what could be classed as spiritual crises, some of the suicides had told they had been suffering from the devil's temptations and trickery or even infestation of demons or other evil spirits. For example, in 1682 in Vendel, Elin Mattsdotter had mentioned that she was "unable to eat because the devil bound her so tight."<sup>37</sup> In 1697, Erich Michellsson had told in his confession to the pastor that he was affected by and had fallen into Satan's temptations.<sup>38</sup> A few

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- 33 Familiar e.g. via the works of Martin Luther, Enoch Haqvini Cringelius (1559–1632), E.H. Cringelius, *Een lîthen tröstsententia, til allom them, som j thenne sijdste och ytherste werldennes tijdh, sorgfulle och bedröffuadhe ähre, / författat och schriffuin. Aff. Enoch Haqvini* (Stockholm, 1604) and Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600) (Hemmingsen, *Antidotum*). Also directly connected to suicide e.g. in the paragraph on the denial of Christian burial in The Church Ordinance of 1571, in *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), p. 136.
  - 34 E.g. KA: RT Turku rr RO z 34: 119–23, Turku 7 Apr. 1666; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164<sup>v</sup>–67, Sollefteå 5–6 July 1682; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357–59, Rautu 31 July 1682; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; ULA: KLHA Serie v, A I: 1, 309–16, Garpenberg 20 Dec. 1690; KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 210–20, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, pp. 2–3 (Erich Andersson), 5–6 (Petter Wellamson), 7 (Johannes Ornelius), and 17–18 (Mattis de Näff). See also Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 319–23.
  - 35 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 316–23. See also, e.g. Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 169–72.
  - 36 E.g. Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," pp. 77–120; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*, pp. 3–12.
  - 37 "[H]ar hon swarat att hinhåle så hårdt förbindit henne att hon intet kunna få äta någon Maat." ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d: 2, Vendel 24 May 1682.
  - 38 KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529–31<sup>v</sup>, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

others even mentioned that a devil had, in fact, wounded them or instigated the suicidal act.<sup>39</sup> Like elsewhere in early modern Europe,<sup>40</sup> experiences of the personal influence of the devil and views of Satanic forces related to suicides were not uncommon,<sup>41</sup> and understandable in the religious discourse of the era characterised by the demonization of the world.<sup>42</sup> Already Luther had emphasised the role of the Devil, considering that suicides were overwhelmed by the power of the Devil, who tempted people to fall into despair and kill themselves.<sup>43</sup>

All in all, these experiences of religious crises indicate that religiously motivated anxieties could be connected to suicidal urges in seventeenth-century Sweden. However, their relatively small number and share in the sample suggests that, like for example in early modern Geneva,<sup>44</sup> personal religious conflicts and anxiety were not a significant cause of suicide; instead, other factors, including mental and physical illnesses and disabilities, poverty, and economic troubles, were clearly more often connected with suicidal behaviour.<sup>45</sup>

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- 39 KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 7: 478–79, li 9–10 Apr. 1652; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson).
- 40 See, e.g. Lederer, “The Dishonorable Dead,” pp. 351–52; Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 151–53; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 34, 42–43, and 49–56; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 72–74 and 132–34, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 254–58.
- 41 The devil linked with suicidal acts and/or thoughts, e.g., the sermons by Ericus Erici Sorolainen. E. E. Sorolainen, *Postilla, Vol. 1* [1621], Facsimile, ed. Martti Parvio (Helsinki, 1988), pp. 488 and 714; KA: RT Savo KO a 2, 740–45, Rantasalmi 17 June 1648; KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää KO a 11: 8–16, Vyborg 28–29 Jan. 1670; RA: SHA Stockholms län 4b: 599–601<sup>v</sup>, Öregrund 18 June 1686; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 36a: 350–356, Ovan sjö 4 May 1689; RA: SHA Stockholms län 5: 177<sup>v</sup>–78<sup>v</sup>, Färentuna 3 Oct. 1695; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 21: 1077–84, Liminka 12 June 1700. For an interpretation that the devil could in its immaterial form infiltrate a person in his sleep and plant despaired and suicidal thoughts and delusions, see KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 1: 586–97, Kemi 12–15 July 1681.
- 42 On the “Demonisation” of the world in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, see also Erik H.C. Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford, 1999), pp. 51–58 and 376–81; Soili-Maria Olli, “Paholainen on minun veljeni: Kirkon ja kansan paholaiskuva uuden ajan alussa,” in *Paholainen, noituus ja magia: kristinuskon kääntöpuoli: pahuuden kuvasto vanhassa maailmassa*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (Helsinki, 2004), pp. 116–35, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 254–56.
- 43 Luther’s Large Catechism, e.g. a seventeenth-century translation into Swedish *D. Martini Lutheri Catechismus 1667* [1529], pp. 204–05; Alexander Kästner, *Tödliche Geschichte(n): Selbsttötungen und Suizidversuche in Kursachsen 1547–1815* (Dresden, 2010), pp. 94–108.
- 44 Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 258–63.
- 45 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 387–94.

In general, there is no evidence of how widespread or prevalent religious crises and afflictions were.<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that the throes of guilt and turmoil over salvation preoccupied in particular the individuals who appear to have been perhaps more devout and immersed in spiritual matters than the average. This suggests that an inclination for religious devotion in general predisposed one to spiritual crises and to this type of suicidal anxiety.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the cases manifest the pervasiveness of faith and preoccupation with one's sinfulness and salvation in the mentality of many people, if not even more generally in the early modern experience.

Unsurprisingly, the treatment and sought cure for such crises and suicidal thoughts was religious practice. Considered as products of a guilty conscience over a sin or some form of madness, despaired, melancholic, and suicidal thoughts were best diluted by prayer, reading and singing Psalms, or conducting other religious practices. Numerous people attempted to find solace in prayer, were visited by clergy for spiritual consolation, and were even interceded for by their kin and fellows or at Church.<sup>48</sup> To give an example, a mentally disturbed woman, Anna, had for months before drowning herself been obsessed with prayer and kept going on about God to help her and give her

46 See also MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 65–66; Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 203–04, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, 262–63.

47 As suggested by the cases presented above, as well as cases presented in research literature, incl. MacDonald & Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 65–66; Midelfort, *A History of Madness*, pp. 310–12; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*; Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the care of the soul: religion, moral philosophy and madness in early modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 64–75 and *passim*; Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*; Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 255–63.

48 E.g. KA: RT Turku rr RO z 34: 119–23, Turku 7 Apr. 1666; KA: RT Kymenkartano län KO a 2: 360<sup>v</sup>–61, Vehkalahti 25 Nov. 1672; KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta ja Äyräpää KO a 17:235–37, Lappee 30 Sept. 1680; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II: 2, Svartlösa 6 Dec. 1682; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218–20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683; ULA: Örebro länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet. D I qa: 3, Glanshammar 17 July 1686; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892–99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 13: 91–94, Sotkamo 10 Aug 1692; RA: SHA Kopparberg 30a: 560–62, Sundborn 22 May 1694; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 5, 81–83, Vika 3 Apr. 1695; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, pp. 46–47; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, Vol 5, p. 53. The guidebooks specifically prescribed devout religious practice, including prayer, reading the Psalms, and singing hymns for the troubled. E.g. Cringelius, *Een lîthen tröstsententia*. The clergy was instructed to carefully keep an eye on, console, and tutor the melancholic and the despaired. E.g. Hemmingsen, *Antidotum*; Johannes Gezelius, *Perbreves Commonitiones* (1673), Cap. VIII.



faith. The pastor had also organised prayers on her behalf in the Church.<sup>49</sup> In general, prayer and other devotions were considered suitable cures for various mental and physical conditions.<sup>50</sup> This can in part explain why so many were mentioned to have gone to Church or visited pastors and chaplains very recently.

### Hell or Heaven? The Consequences of Breaching Norms Surrounding Dying

Despite, as we have seen, some of the suicides had endured religiously motivated emotional turmoil, it can be presumed that the greatest spiritual crisis was ultimately to make the decision to end one's life. As also seen in the examples above, many suicidal individuals were extremely concerned with their salvation and the idea of life after death.<sup>51</sup> At least for religious people who accepted the traditional and mainstream theological views on the sinfulness of the act, taking one's own life was not a logical choice.

Most importantly, it was still considered that dying in the very act of sinning and unrepentant could preclude one's salvation. Receiving the care of the Church at the deathbed remained pivotal after the Reformation, and dying well, i.e., a holy death, required careful spiritual preparations. Interpretations of a dramatic shift in the rituals, beliefs and attitudes related to death and burials due to the Reformation<sup>52</sup> have more recently been challenged. Although death without preparation was certainly a complex theological issue for the Protestants who emphasised the importance of faith alone and

49 RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80<sup>v</sup>–82<sup>v</sup>, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo, and Tuna, no date [hereafter n.d.] 1695. Similarly, another mentally disturbed woman, Karin Joensdotter, experiencing great restlessness, melancholia, insomnia, a heavy heart, and suicidal thoughts, kept fervently praying for God and was prayed for in the parish but, failing to find solace, hung herself in Husby in 1687. RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892–99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687.

50 Lederer, *Madness, State and Religion*, pp. 1–21, 59–71, and *passim*; Andrew Wear, "Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700," in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, eds. Lawrence I. Conrad, Michael Neve, Vivian Nutton, Roy Porter, and Andrew Wear (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 240–41.

51 See also Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, p. 114.

52 E.g. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes toward Death over the last one thousand years* [orig. *L'homme devant la mort*, 1977], trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 2008), pp. 297–352 and *passim*; Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700* (Basingstoke, 2000).

rejected intercession, necessity to perform penitential deeds, and many other rites, the deathbed practices and the ideas of a good death were characterised by continuity.<sup>53</sup>

In general, the popular masses had not adopted many of the ideas of the Reformation and Lutheranism, as the continuation and syncretism of many Catholic beliefs and rituals in popular religion and religious practice in seventeenth-century Sweden manifests.<sup>54</sup> Also the hour of death and the precepts of a good death retained many traditions and old features in post-Reformation Sweden. Turning to God and confessing one's sins, followed by receiving God's forgiveness through the pastor and partaking Communion, were integral parts of the *mors bona*. Alongside the personal faith and trust in God and God's mercy, in practice the mentioned rituals as well as true repentance over one's sins and overcoming doubt, disbelief, despair, and evil in one's last moments were considered important. This meant that all types of sudden deaths were feared, though obviously deaths associated with sin were the worst.<sup>55</sup>

It must be pointed out that even if the funeral sermons and *personalia* of the elite, discussed in the articles by Anu Lahtinen and Otfried Czaika in this volume, presented the piety during one's lifetime sufficient as the means of

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- 53 E.g. Volker Leppin, "Preparing for Death: From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon," in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygaard, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 27 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9–23; Peter Marshall, "After Purgatory: Death and Remembrance in the Reformation World," in *ibid.*, pp. 25–43; Claudia Resch, "Reforming Late Medieval *Ars Moriendi*: Changes and Compromises in Early Reformation Manuals for use at the Deathbed," in *ibid.*, pp. 153–72. See also Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Aldershot, 2007).
  - 54 Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro*; Raisa Maria Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland* (Basingstoke, 2016); Miia Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710)*, PhD Thesis (Jyväskylä, 2016).
  - 55 Hall, *Rudbeckii Kyrkodisciplin*, pp. 71–72; Juva, *Varsinais-Suomen seurakuntaelämä*, p. 66; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, p. 114; Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Skellefteå, 2008), pp. 127–230. On preparatory rituals for death in the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, see, e.g. *HandBok Ther uti är författat huruledes Gudztiensten med Christelige Ceremonier och kyrckioseder uti våra Swenska Församlingar skal blifwa hållen och förhandlad. Förbättrad och förmehrad i Stockholm årh 1599. Öfwersedd årh 1608. Och numehra efter nyja kyrckio-ordningen inrättad årh 1693* (Stockholm, 1693), pp. 135–56 and 185; *Een Lijten Lustigh Wijsa Om Dödzens art och Menniskiornas Lijffz ostadigheet och Lefwernes kortheet och owissheet* (broadside) (Stockholm, 1648).

grace even in cases of sudden deaths,<sup>56</sup> in practice the last moments and the manner or way of death also mattered. This can be seen, for example, in the various treatises and other texts discussing the horridness of dying in sin and/or unrepentant,<sup>57</sup> and in the emphasis given on the confession, Communion, and pastoral care of the sick and dying in the legislation. The pastor was to do his best to prevent people from dying in sin by encouraging confession and repentance. In fact, it was even punishable if the pastor neglected these duties, or to not call for the pastor in time to the deathbed.<sup>58</sup> The practice of denying burial in the church or churchyard and the usual funerary process from persons who had died unrepentant while sinning similarly manifests the importance of one's last moments.<sup>59</sup> After all, the locus of burial and ceremonies were still of the essence, and the denial of Christian burial locations and rites for certain groups was an ecclesiastical penalty that reflected the separation of their souls from the Christian community and salvation.<sup>60</sup>

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- 56 Anu Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," and Otfried Czaika, "Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons," in this volume. As discussed by Lahtinen, the representations of the aristocrats' preparations for death, pious lives, and last moments served many ideological and political purposes.
- 57 E.g. Johannes Æpinus, *En liten Tractaat Om Ogudhachtigha och Ketterska menniskior begraffning. D. Iohannis Epini fordrom Superintendentis Hamburgensis Förwenskat Aff Samuele Olai comministro Arosiense* [Original work published in German in 1547], trans. Samuel Olaus (Wästerås, 1624), pp. D iii–D iiiiv and *passim*; Cringelius, *Een litten tröstsententia*, pp. 43v–44; Olof Laurelius, *Gudz klagan öfwer then stora Otacksamheeten, Säkra och ondskofulla Lefwernet. Så och Skrymtachtiga Gudztiensten som nu allestädes uti Werldenne spöries och i vårt Fädernesland öfwerhanden tagher* (Wästerås, 1662), pp. E vii–F iiiv, G iv–Gv; Cap. v, and in numerous broadsides, e.g. *Synda-ånger Uthbrustin När dhen ynkelige Förskräckeliga och allom Menniskiom Fassliga Misfödel sikh* (n.p., 1691).
- 58 Kyrkolag 1686, Cap. xvii § 1–vii; Negligence to call for a pastor was punishable for those hosting the sick and dying according to a resolution passed in 1697, in Anders Anton von Stiernman, *Alla riksdags och mötens besluth, samt arfföreningar, regements-former, försäkringar och bewillningar, som på allemann riksdagar och möter ifrån år 1521 intil år 1727 giorde stadgade och bewiljade är*. Vol. III (Stockholm, 1733), p. 2134.
- 59 Including the excommunicated, unrepentant blasphemers, those who suddenly died while committing vices, murdered unbaptised children, and suicides. The Church Ordinance of 1571, in *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), pp. 136–37; Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*, p. 158.
- 60 Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, *passim*; Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, p. 100, 132 and 138. See also Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*. The importance of burial locations and funerary ceremonies also pointed out in Dominika Burdzy, "The Concern for Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century," in this volume.

Suicide was certainly not a "good death," as the person killing oneself not only died breaching the God's commandments and plan but also, if considered sane, had died in despair, turning his or her back on God. Most importantly, upon death the person was (typically) unable to express remorse over these last sins. The mainstream view was, like Enoch Haqvini Cringelius, a vicar and dean in southern Sweden put it in 1604, that the act of suicide – as a clear manifestation of despair – condemned one to Hell for eternity.<sup>61</sup> In fact, these lines of thinking inspired suicidal but religious individuals to commit and confess or falsely confess even murders, bestiality, and other capital offences in the hope of receiving the death penalty. They believed their souls could thereby be saved for they, unlike suicides, could die as penitents, make the abovementioned spiritual preparations, and receive most of the rituals before their execution.<sup>62</sup>

However, regardless of this official discourse, there were ambivalent and dissident views. It must be pointed out that Luther had made no definite pronouncements on the fate of suicides in the afterlife, portraying them as Satan's victims and even considering, in private, that God could forgive at least some suicides who could still be saved by the grace of God.<sup>63</sup> At times the Svea Court of Appeal jurists, serving in the Swedish Realm's most important judicial instance, considered and wrote down in their case summaries that some who had committed their suicidal act in madness and had had time to repent and receive Communion before passing away had undergone a holy death.<sup>64</sup> Thus, for some it seemed that at least an insane suicide might still receive

61 Cringelius, *Een lithen tröstsententia*, pp. 43<sup>v</sup>–44. Also, e.g. the view of Claudius Kloot (c. 1612–90), a renowned Swedish jurist. Claudius Kloot, *Then Swenska lagfarenheetz spegel: Uthi fyra böcker fördeelt och beskrefwen aff Claudio Kloot* (Gothenburg, 1676), pp. 56–57.

62 Jansson, *From swords to sorrow*, pp. 63–64; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, pp. 79–81, 132, and *passim*. Many confessed crimes of bestiality very likely had suicidal motives. See Jonas Liliequist, *Brott, synd och straff: tidelagsbrottet i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Umeå, 1991), pp. 107–17. There are also indications that some of the infanticides were similarly motivated. For such examples in eighteenth-century Finland, see Mona Rautelin, *En förutbestämd sanning: Barnamord och delaktighet i 1700-talets Finland belysta genom kön, kropp och social kontroll* (Helsinki, 2009), pp. 92–94.

63 Kästner, *Tödliche Geschichte(n)*, pp. 94–108; Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation," pp. 300–01.

64 Their holy death or pardoning explicitly mentioned e.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 23–25. Also e.g. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D 11: 2, Svartlösa 6 Dec. 1682. Cf. there were ambivalent views on the fate of the sane suicides who had had the time to repent and/or even receive absolution and Communion before passing away. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 17–18 (Mattis de Näff); RA: Riksarkivets

God's mercy and join the heavenly afterlife. For example, the pastor of Järvsjö pondered the question in the trial of Joen Anunsson's suicide in 1679, and the pastor of Maria Andersdotter, a pitiful wife who had lost her senses due her husband's violence, considered in her trial in Lagunda in 1691 that although she had hanged herself, God would be merciful for she had been so insane.<sup>65</sup>

The court records of suicides indicate that in general the suicides of those considered "insane," for example, due to melancholia, furor, or other recognised mental illness, or due to dotage, minority, or some other form of mental weakness were viewed more accidental and less intentional, and thus, less condemnable. Even the more lenient form of criminal punishment reserved for the insane suicides in Sweden, burial somewhere outside the churchyard as opposed to burning and disposing the remains in the woods, manifests this idea. In early modern Europe, in many laws and among the jurists at least, there were long traditions of not holding the insane responsible for their criminal actions as they could not act deliberately or in full awareness of their actions due to their disturbed minds.<sup>66</sup>

In the minds of the contemporaries, the mental state of the suicide mattered in regard to the eligibility or possibility for salvation. The praxis of allowing silent burials "inside" the churchyards for some of the "insane" suicides who had been religious and devout in their lifetime,<sup>67</sup> and jurists' suggestions

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ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson); RA: SHA Uppsala län, 48a: 437<sup>v</sup>–42<sup>v</sup>, Ulleråkers 17 May 1688.

65 RA: SHA, Gävleborgs län 27a: 430<sup>v</sup>–36, Järvsjö 6 June 1679; RA: SHA Upplands län, 53b: 556<sup>v</sup>–61<sup>v</sup>, Lagunda 20 Nov. 1691. See also RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 57. Cf. Also Robert Burton, in his massive work on melancholia published in 1621, considered that the suicides who had acted in madness or melancholia would get to Heaven. The paragraph in which he discusses the possible salvation of suicides presented e.g. in Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead," p. 352.

66 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 126–29; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 133–40.

67 E.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 21–25, 29–36, and 53–60; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel 1. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A 1:3, Frösthult 7 Jan. 1654; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892–99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1:1, 16–17, Tuna 19 Apr. 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1:1, 109–09<sup>v</sup>, Tuna 23 Sept. 1689; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1:2, 74–76<sup>v</sup>, Torsång 16 July 1691; ULA: Kopparbergs länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D 11:18, Sundborn 26 May 1694; ULA: Faluns rådhusrätts arkiv (Falun rr och mag.) A 1a: 18, n.p. Falun 14/15 Apr. 1697; ULA: KLHA Serie XXVI A 1: 1, n.p., Lima 6 Dec. 1698. Also, the Svea Court of Appeal in general revised the sentences for the "insane" suicides, including those suffering from mental illnesses or mental weakness because of dotage or fevers, so that they were allowed silent burials, i.e. burials inside the churchyard in its inferior, outlying spots without ceremonies. ULA: Kortregister över

of exempting the insane from legal punishments entirely<sup>68</sup> can be interpreted as manifestations of the views that not all suicides were to be expelled from the Christian community, and thus neither from resurrection. At times, several members of the local community pleaded for a burial inside the churchyard. To give an example, in 1679 the lower court in Järvsjö refused to pass a sentence for a respected former scribe and their fellow jury member, Pär Olofsson, who had stabbed himself. Witnesses invoked his melancholia and religious and good reputation, and even the members of the court pleaded for a burial in the churchyard. Later the Court of Appeal indeed allowed his corpse to be interred in the cemetery, though in silence and in its northern, inferior part.<sup>69</sup> So again, in the case of suicides, piety during lifetime alone was not enough to serve as the means of grace;<sup>70</sup> the person committing suicide had to also be classified as insane.<sup>71</sup> Based on all this, it appears that at least some considered that committing the sin of suicide did not preclude the insane from salvation. This was

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Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar. Also, in the 1690s, the Svea Court of Appeal gave precedents according to which even mentally sane minors should be allowed silent burials inside the churchyard. RA: SHA B III b 1:2, 260–61, Kriminella resolutioner 27 Aug. 1695; ULA: Västmanlands länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D 1:32, Skinnskatteberg 24 Oct. 1696; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D Iid:51, Håbo 23 Oct. 1700. Moreover, as mentioned, the Church Ordinance in force between 1571 and 1686 only denied burial in the churchyard from despaired and sane suicides – pastors, deans and bishops at times allowed interments in the cemetery especially for the suicides who were deemed having been insane. E.g. ULA: Uppsala domkapitel 1. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A 1:2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel 1. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A 1:4, Frösthult 7 Jan. 1654; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel 1. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A 1:8, Wahlby 5 Sept. 1677; see also Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*, pp. 276–78.

68 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 79–90. Law drafts and records of the discussions in the preparation for a new law, in "Lagförslag af 1643 års andra lagberedning, afgifvet den 8 Augusti 1643," in C.J. Wahlberg, ed., *Åtgärder för Lagförbättring 1633–1665* (Upsala, 1878), p. 164; "Rosengrenska lagförslaget," in *Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia: Andra serien, 1: Lagförslag i Karl den Niondes tid* (Stockholm, 1864), p. 476; "Lagkommissionens protokoll 1694–1711," in *Förarbetena till Sveriges Rikes Lag 1686–1736*, 2, ed. Wilhelm Sjögren (Uppsala, 1901), pp. 42 and 149.

69 RA: SHA, Gävleborgs län 27a: 436–41, Järvsjö 21 Jul. 1679; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: BP, 5, 31. Also, e.g. KA: RT Savo KO a 2, 740–746<sup>v</sup>, Rantasalmi 17 June 1648; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 10: 7<sup>v</sup>, Rautu, Sakkola & Pyhäjärvi 22–26 Jan. 1689.

70 Cf. the interpretation in Otfried Czaika, "Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons," in this volume that based on the early modern Swedish funeral sermons the view was that everyone was prepared for death and that Christian life was considered sufficient as the means of grace and salvation.

71 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 358–59, 433, and 442–43.

also the view of Petrus Laurbecchius (1628–1705), professor of theology at the University of Turku, who in a dissertation published in 1680 concluded that while suicide could not be justified or permitted under any circumstances, the insane could be excused and might be saved if they had lived well.<sup>72</sup>

Still, unorthodox interpretations of the gravity of the deed and salvation of also the mentally sane suicides did exist. For example, Johan Munster (d. 1714), professor of philosophy at the University of Turku, mentioned in 1696 that some of his contemporaries held the idea that suicides committed because of disgrace, imprisonment, slavery, hunger, old age, or other such hardships might be justified. Though Munster himself considered this view entirely faulty and wrong,<sup>73</sup> this already suggests that a suicide could be commiserated with and even considered an understandable resolution, depending on the situation.

It appears that some considered that God could be merciful also for the sane suicides. A good example of this is the only case in the material in which the person had left a suicide note. Johan, a crofter living near Stockholm wrote his last words on a piece of paper under great pains caused by his severe illness in 1697. Addressed to no one in particular, he stated that (paraphrased by the scribe) “no one should think that he has any great sins on his conscience, for God has forgiven him, and therefore he knows that his soul is with God, and Jesus Christ his saviour and redeemer will be merciful to him”<sup>74</sup> and “that the great pains, that endured him night and day, forced him into this.”<sup>75</sup> He had arranged to be at home alone, sending his son outside while his wife was at Church. Before shooting himself he had obviously done some spiritual

72 Petrus Laurbecchius, *Discursus philosophicus miscellaneas aliquot exhibens quaestiones quas cum suffragio and consensu amplissimae facultatis philosophicae in Regiâ Academiâ Aboensi [...]*, Diss. Turku (Holmiae, 1680), p. B. Similarly, for example, in 1685 Svea Court of Appeal regarded that Jöran Bark, who had in his severe insanity killed himself by first lighting his bed and clothes on fire and then jumping out from the high building, could be forgiven and saved, for he had not only lived a God-fearing life but apparently also prayed before jumping. Thus, he was allowed an honourable, Christian burial. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika 1: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 57.

73 See Munster's dissertation presented and discussed in Kauko Kouvalainen and Veli-Matti Rissanen, “Terveestä itsetunnosta väiteltiin sivistysyliopistossa 1696,” *Hüidenkivi* 2012:3 (2012), pp. 8–10.

74 “[A]tt ingen det skulle tänckia att han någre stora synder hade på sig: Ty Gud hade gifwit honom hans synder till, och derföre weet, att hans Siäl är hos Gud och Jesus Christus hans frälsare och återlösare woro honom nådelig.” ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv D IId: 43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

75 “[A]tt den stora wärcken twingade honom der till, som han lijdit natt och dag.” ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv D IId:43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

thinking and had made his peace with God according to his quite unorthodox interpretation. Altogether, as already the previous examples have shown, many of the suicides had been devout believers<sup>76</sup> – the fact that they regardless of their religiosity ended up taking their own lives alone suggests that there were ambivalent views on the salvation of suicides' souls.

### Preparations for an "Unholy" Death

As mentioned, many of the would-be suicides appear to have been to Church recently and involved in fervent religious practice, seeking cure for their suicidal thoughts, emotional turmoil, mental or other illnesses or other misfortunes. Yet, not all such behaviour was connected to finding solace and aid. Like Johan and Reinhold, mentioned above, some of the people who were contemplating suicide made clear religious preparations for their self-inflicted demise.

As mentioned, confession and repentance, followed by receiving forgiveness through the pastor and Holy Communion, were vital parts of the *mors bona* in early modern Sweden. Some of the suicides felt important to follow these standards of *ars moriendi* to at least redeem themselves from their past sins and manifest their faith in God even if they chose to die "in sin."<sup>77</sup> In Kokkola in 1671, it was even interpreted that Per Jönsson Karfwanen, imprisoned

76 E.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, Causa VI, pp. 29–36 and 57–60; ULA: Uppsala domkapitels arkiv, protokoll A I:2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv (KLHA) Serie IV A1:2, 7<sup>v</sup>–9, Mora 26 Aug. 1664; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164<sup>v</sup>–67, Sollefteå 5–6 July 1682; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892–99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; RA: SHA Kopparberg 23a: 314<sup>v</sup>–23, Hedemora r1 18–20 July 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 1, 109–09<sup>v</sup>, Tuna 23 Sept. 1689; RA: SHA Upplands län, 53b: 556<sup>v</sup>–61<sup>v</sup>, Lagunda 20 Nov. 1691; RA: SHA Kopparberg 30a: 560–62, Sundborn 22 May 1694; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80<sup>v</sup>–82<sup>v</sup>, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo och Tuna n.d.1695; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:5, 70–70<sup>v</sup>, Skedvi 4 July 1695.

77 Visits to church or pastors, confessions, and communions right before killing themselves: ULA: Uppsala domkapitels arkiv, protokoll A I: 3, Långtora 4th June 1644; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; RA: SHA Kopparberg 23a: 314<sup>v</sup>–23, Hedemora r1 18–20 July 1687. Other very recently received communions: KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää: KO a 13: 363–73, Vyborg 22 May 1673; RA: SHA, Västernorrlands län 7a: 445–46<sup>v</sup>, Gudmundrå 30 Jan 1686; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 13: 91–94, Sotkamo 10 Aug. 1692; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:5, 70–70<sup>v</sup>, Skedvi 4 July 1695; KA: RT Kymenkartano and Lappee KO a 10: 406–10, Kymi 23 July 1696. Also, as mentioned in Sollefteå in 1682, Sara had, before strangling herself, gone to confess her past sins to the pastor but had refused to take communion because she felt that God could not forgive her, RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164<sup>v</sup>–67, Sollefteå 5–6 July 1682.



for rape, had faked an illness before strangling himself so that he could confess his sins, make atonement, and receive Communion before killing himself.<sup>78</sup> The preferences and reasoning of some to commit suicide indirectly, by proxy by committing and confessing capital offences rather than killing themselves directly, similarly manifests the importance of receiving the last rites.<sup>79</sup> Like Johan Fleming felt, as presented in Anu Lahtinen's chapter in this volume, it was important to confess and receive Communion, "the true passport [...] to the hereafter."<sup>80</sup> Moreover, obvious attempts were made by pastors to save the souls of those who had wounded themselves but were still barely alive by trying to make them confess, repent, and even take Communion,<sup>81</sup> which similarly demonstrates the significance of repentance and atonement before death in the early modern Lutheran culture.

Also, some of the would-be suicides turned to God in private and immersed themselves in rigorous personal prayer in their preparations.<sup>82</sup> For example, in the suicide trial of Karin Olofsdotter in Åkerbo in 1695, it was considered as aggravating evidence and preparations for suicide that in her last days before drowning herself she had read the Scripture and her prayers significantly more often than before.<sup>83</sup> These behaviours and the type of resignation from the world and focus on religion can also be interpreted as preparations for death and the afterlife.

The preparations not only show that some attempted to follow the Christian tradition and at least some of the precepts of the ideal *ars moriendi*, but also suggest that, regardless of the mainstream Lutheran theological views on the

78 KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 12: esp. 720<sup>v</sup>–21, Kokkola 8 July 1671; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 12, esp. 726<sup>v</sup>, Kokkola 15–17 Aug. 1671.

79 Jansson, *From swords to sorrow*, pp. 63–64; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, pp. 79–81, 132, and *passim*. Krogh has suggested that the Lutheran Church not only enabled the suicidal to receive the last rituals considered significant for salvation but also provided the most optimistic message to persons about to be executed.

80 Case presented in Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," in this volume.

81 E.g. KA: RT Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 131–34, Eura 19 July 1682; RA: SHA Uppsala län 42: 604<sup>v</sup>, Svartlösa 17 Nov. 1682; RA: SHA Uppsala län, 48a: 437<sup>v</sup>–42<sup>v</sup>, Ulleråkers 17 May 1688; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet, D II d: 36, Frötuna 8 Mar. 1695; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 17–18 (Mattis de Näff); RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson); RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 23–25.

82 E.g. ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1:5, 70–70<sup>v</sup>, Skedvi 4 July 1695 ULA: VMLL D 1:31, Åkerbo 1 Aug. 1695; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv D IId:43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

83 ULA: VMLL D 1:31, Åkerbo 1 Aug. 1695.

destiny of a suicide's soul, some did kindle a hope that they might still receive God's mercy. Perhaps due to the existing lenient views on the salvation of those who acted while out of their minds, some believed that God could be merciful even for the sane who lived in unbearable situations and thus considered it best to make spiritual preparations. They probably reasoned and felt that they kept their faith and trust in God and his mercy. Thus, they in fact followed the central Lutheran doctrine, even if their suicide was considered and taught to manifest the ultimate despair in that they had not trusted in and served under God's word and plan by accepting their God-set course of life and hour of death patiently. Even if they were unable to confess and repent their last sin to a pastor, they could at least repent and turn to God in their last breath. For example, it was claimed that Erich Nilsson, a highly devout man, was found having drowned himself floating in the water "with his hands folded like he had in his last moment prayed to God."<sup>84</sup>

However, it must be pointed out that preparations of this type of spiritual nature were in no way the most common recognised preparations among the suicides. Any signs or interpretations of preparations for the suicide or death in general were of interest and considered aggravating pieces of evidence in the suicide trials. Practical preparations, i.e., finding privacy and a suited suicide method and location, were obviously vital. This was not necessarily an easy task in the relatively small and well-knit village or town communities of early modern Sweden. Choosing a method and instrument from the rather limited selection that was accessible – in an era where drugs and firearms were not available to most people – and finding a private location and a good occasion were matters that typically required some planning.<sup>85</sup>

Also, forewarning one's family and friends was not uncommon,<sup>86</sup> and even arrangements for one's temporal matters were made. For example, in the town of Sala in 1687 an ironworker, Jacob Månsson, had before stabbing himself given advice to his small children not to worry too much, to remember to read their prayers, go to Church, and be obedient to their mother. He was even interpreted having rationed his eating and for some days refused to take provisions

84 "[M]ed ihoopknippade händer, likasåsom att hafwa i sitt ytterste åkallat Gudh." ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1: 5, 70–70<sup>v</sup>, Skedvi 4 July 1695.

85 Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 165–67, 267–74, and 294–95.

86 E.g. KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää, KO a 13: 363–73, Vyborg 22 May 1673; KA: RT Kymenkartano and Lappee KO a 1: 10–11, Kymi and Vehkalahti 12–14 Feb. 1681; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357–59, Rautu 31 July 1682; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 10: 232–35, Kemi 19–21 Feb. 1690; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A 1: 2, 74–76<sup>v</sup>, Torsång 16 July 1691; RA: SHA, Västernorrlands län 14: 240–44, Nätra 5 Sept. 1694; KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529–31<sup>v</sup>, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

to work so that his family would have something to eat.<sup>87</sup> However, there are no mentions of wills having been made. Also, unlike those preparing to die in the usual manners, the would-be suicides did not, for obvious reasons, make funerary arrangements, nor could even ensure that their remains would be treated with some dignity.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, preparations of all sorts were made but they could not be made too conspicuously in order to avoid interruptions or becoming guarded and kept under suicide watch. After all, no doubt the suicidal people themselves knew what they were planning was categorically condemned by the society. This in part explains why only sporadic information has been preserved and recorded of the preparations: people contemplating suicide had to prepare for death in secret. Even the bereaved had an interest to not to share information of preparations, and thus premeditation, in the trials if they were hoping for an acquittal or at least the more lenient form of punishment reserved for the insane suicides. On the other hand, it is also possible that the scarcity of mentions of spiritual preparations for death among the suicidal in the sources simply manifests that the vast majority accepted the mainstream view on their lot in the afterlife or that it did not matter to them.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, some of the would-be suicides in seventeenth-century Sweden had endured various types of spiritual crises, including worries over one's salvation, overbearing compunctions over sins, and experiences of God turning his back on them. No doubt, devout individuals have always suffered from and endured anxiety related to religion and soul-searching.

However, such crises were relatively rarely mentioned in the suicide trials which suggests that religious anxiety and suicidal despair were not as prevalent in the Lutheran confessional culture as suggested earlier. Instead, for the religious, the greatest spiritual crisis was surely to reconcile their planned sinful act with their beliefs of eternal afterlife and hopes of salvation and

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87 RA: SHA Västerås 3: 695–96, Sala 14 May 1687. The lower court also considered noteworthy that over a week before dying by self-inflicted sword wounds, a soldier, Erich Älli, had borrowed some money that he had given for the sustenance of his wife and six children living on support of others in another locality. KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 14: 384–406, Vehmaa and Lokalahti 12–13 Mar. 1700.

88 Cf. the careful arrangements of funerals and gravestones by the nobility in Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," in this volume.

receiving God's mercy. Although there existed nuanced views on the eligibility of the insane suicides for salvation, committing suicide while of sound mind and joining the heavenly afterlife were considered incompatible at least in the mainstream views. Based on the general religious discourse and strict mentality of the era promulgating the terribleness of self-killing and the expressed worries over salvation, feelings of unbearable weights of guilty conscience, frequent church attendance, and personal religious practice, some of the suicidal were clearly troubled in the face of their desire to end their earthly existence.

The beliefs of the grim destiny of a sane suicide's soul as well as the inability to repent the ultimate sin, to follow the usual *ars moriendi* with its last rituals, and to receive a proper burial when killing oneself could lead into turning to extraordinary measures, i.e., committing indirect suicide by committing or falsely confessing capital crimes. Execution allowed the necessary preceding rituals, including pastoral visits confession, penance, and partaking Communion, that were, after all, thought to enable going through a holy, Christian death.<sup>89</sup>

Still, the authorities' teaching and mainstream Lutheran understanding of the exclusion of sane suicides from the Christian community and salvation did not stop people from making unorthodox interpretations of their personal salvation. Spiritual preparations were made for their self-inflicted demise that could be followed – like some plausibly believed – with future resurrection. The would-be suicides that regardless of their choice followed the precepts of the *ars moriendi* did not feel that they died spiritually unprepared. Their behaviour of confessions and other religious practice prior to their planned demise suggests that they had made their peace with God placing their faith and trust in God's mercy. In general, it can be assumed that although some of the would-be suicides possibly ignored the issue, most very likely at least pondered their fate in the hereafter and either hoped for the best or accepted the official views on their act and gruesome destiny in the afterlife.

The sporadic mentions of the spiritual preparations among the suicides, including prayers, rushed confessions, and partaking Communion prior to their act, represent the great significance of these practices and procedures related to a good death and dying well in early modern Sweden. Alongside these cases, many texts describing good and bad deaths published in seventeenth-century Sweden, the burial practices of many groups that had died unrepentant while sinning, and the behaviour and logic expressed by the suicidal who committed

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89 Being executed allowed adequate time to make good preparations, as shown, for example, in the case of Johan Fleming described in Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," in this volume.

capital offences in order to be executed manifest the importance of spiritual preparations, especially confession, repentance, and receiving Communion, in the last moments of one's life.

Thus, faith alone, nor a devout, Christian life was ultimately not enough even in post-Reformation Sweden – one also had to die well, at least not via sin like premeditated suicide and without confession and repentance. The results of this article support the interpretations made about the continuation of many beliefs and rituals related to death and dying from the Catholic times even long after the Reformation.<sup>90</sup> In general, the spiritual crises and preparations manifest the diverse religious views, continuation of Catholic and syncretic beliefs and practices, and the heterogeneous, ambiguous and even contradictory opinions of suicide and the salvation of suicides' souls in an era characterised by official religious uniformity.

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90 E.g. Leppin, "Preparing for Death"; Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro*; Marshall, "After Purgatory"; Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*.

## Preparing for Death: Concluding Remarks

*Bertil Nilsson*

The articles in the present book ranges over three religious phases, namely (1) the time when the old Scandinavian pre-Christian religion dominated; (2) the period of the medieval Catholic Church, and (3) the time when the reformed Lutheran theology first started to spread to the northern parts of Europe and then became dominating, resulting in subsequent changes in ecclesiastical practices. Thus, the temporal range is extensive. Similarly wide is the character of the source material that the different authors have chosen in order to elucidate some aspects especially related to individuals preparing for death. However, the preparations also involved those who were close to them and sometimes also others in more distant relationship to the dying, as well as the official representatives of the Church in the form of priests and their assistants.<sup>1</sup>

The different approaches, the width of the time period as well as the varied source material leads to difficulties in making adequate and reasonable comparisons between the articles in this volume. Simultaneously, the range of materials and methods of the articles inspire deeper studies concerning other regions and even different types of sources. This would to a greater extent enable comparisons on a specific topic between different parts of Northern Europe as well as study changes in a long perspective. Thus, the contents of the book can be taken as a starting point for future research within a field that involved everyone regardless of their social class or religious beliefs. Nobody escaped death. But different attitudes reigned during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and they also changed over time during the period in question depending on a variety of different factors. The official teaching of the Church and its practices played a decisive role, but also the economic and social position of the individual were relevant.

So what did it entail to prepare oneself for death during the more than six-century long period that is partially represented in the different articles of this volume? Our knowledge of the pre-Christian Viking-age burial practices in the Nordic countries is relatively good thanks to the results of archeological

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<sup>1</sup> See Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Skellefteå, 2008), pp. 45–49.

research on the material culture.<sup>2</sup> We know considerably less about the burial rites and perceptions of death because of the near-total lack of written sources from the period. This is why researchers have attempted to reconstruct Viking-age beliefs based on literary sources that had been written down and/or composed after the Church had been established. Occasionally, even medieval – or later – popular perceptions have been used as evidence of pre-Christian beliefs regarding death or the dead.<sup>3</sup>

The methodological difficulties involving the use of such sources are obvious, and they are discussed in the chapter by Kirsi Kanerva in this volume. As the character of her sources as well as other texts show, there are obvious pitfalls related to methodology and source criticism – occasionally significant ones – when using literature for investigating the preparations people made before their own demise or that of a close relative. This also touches the preparations – whatever they were, if any – related to the memory of the deceased, its relevance, and which expressions the possible *memoria* culture took.<sup>4</sup>

As Kanerva points out, we do not know if the stories she analyses actually describe a reality or only an imagined one; whether anyone really *performed* any of the actions in Viking-age Iceland that the family sagas, the *Íslendinga-sögur*, claim to record. Have people, living considerably later, when the stories were being narrated, *believed* that their ancestors did what the sagas depict? Or are they pure fiction through and through – and also perceived as such even at the time when they first were narrated. Fiction or fictive elements naturally

2 See for instance, Anne-Sofie Gräslund, *Ideologi och mentalitet: Om religionsskiftet i Skandinavien från en arkeologisk horisont*, (Occasional papers in archaeology) 29 (Uppsala, 2001), pp. 43–55; Anne-Sofie Gräslund, “Religionsskiftet speglar i gravskicket: Ny svensk forskning kring senvikingatida gravar och gravskick,” in *Från hedniskt till kristet: Förändringar i begravningsbruk och gravskick i Skandinavien c:a 800–1200*, ed. Bertil Nilsson (Stockholm, 2010), pp. 131–64; Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, “I døden er vi alle ulike: Gravmateriale i Sør-Norge i yngre jernalder og tidlig middelalder som grunnlag for å belyse kristningen i Norge,” in *ibid.*, pp. 103–30; Markus Hiekkanen, “Burial practices in Finland from Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages,” in *ibid.*, pp. 271–379; Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, *The Viking Age as a Period of Religious Transformation: The Christianization of Norway from AD 560–1150/1200* (Turnhout, 2011).

3 See, for instance, the now classical book Hilda Roderick Ellis, *The Road to Hell: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge, 1943); Louise Hagberg, *När döden gästar: Svenska folkseder och svensk folktro i samband med död och begravning* (Stockholm, [1937] repr. 2015).

4 See the articles in *Memoria: Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter*, eds. Karl Schmid and Joachim Wollasch, (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften) 48 (Munich, 1984).

restrict our possibilities of reaching any sort of reality even if we would wish to do so, instead of only studying the literary expressions.

Be this as it may, the exiting literary sources recount the stories of persons that had an important position in society. We know very little of so-called ordinary people. In addition, we are in a great extent confined to regions in which old Norse was spoken. This is in itself exciting and can be developed further, but it is almost impossible to find evidence beyond this about how preparations for death took place in the pre-Christian Nordic regions. Drawing conclusions based on reasoning of the type that "what was customary in Iceland, was also customary elsewhere" can only be undertaken with many reservations that take both regional variation and temporal changes into consideration.

When we move on to medieval preparations for death, we are already on firmer ground. The articles that deal with this period demonstrate clearly the quintessential importance of three things in medieval theology for the individual's religious life and actions before death. These were (1) the sacrament of penance; (2) the doctrine of purgatory, and (3) masses for the dead. All these three were interrelated in a way that if a person had not performed complete penance, he or she had to cleanse him- or herself by suffering after death in purgatory. On the one hand, this delayed beholding the "beatific vision of God," but on the other, it opened the door to heaven ever so slightly. While still alive, people could influence and shorten the time of the cleansing by their own preparations and procurement of masses and prayers for their souls. This doctrine formed to a great extent the basis of the relationship between the living and the deceased for generations to come when masses were said, prayers were prayed, and indulgences acquired.

Despite this, people did not only have to consider their memory and posthumous reputation, but also be prepared for death and the act of dying. Such attitudes not only explain the testamentary provisions but also the confessions that were made in anticipation of the approaching passing away. Preparations for death were elucidated in detail by the literary tradition that since the fifteenth century and beyond was called the *ars moriendi*. Its aim should be seen against the background of what has been called as "the art of salvation-ensuring living."<sup>5</sup> The individual had to be prepared by emphasizing the passing nature of life and the vanity of all worldly considerations. Moreover, it was important to stress how ignorance of the moment of dying presented a challenge: one had constantly to be wary of falling into sin, especially deadly sin.

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5 Rainer Rudolf, "Ars moriendi: 1. Mittelalter," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 4 (Berlin, 1979), pp. 143–49.



As Mia Korpiola has shown in her chapter, deathbed confessions had a special role in late-medieval Swedish legislation. In addition, other sources illustrate the practice in such confessions that to some extent were regulated by law. By their public character, they differed from private confession that formed part of the sacrament of penance. This publicity was presupposed by law, and probably also corresponded to the wishes of the dying. Even the confessor of the deceased, who ordinarily was sworn to silence under the seal of confession, could witness before a court of law about the contents of the deathbed admissions. Therefore, we are here situated in a situation between the *forum externum* and *forum internum*. The legal relevance of the confession of the dying as evidence was uninterrupted by the Reformation.

But confession also formed part of the individual's preparations in a spiritual sense, not only in a strictly legal context, as it was included in the thorough preparations for death that were an ideal in the medieval Church.

Dominica Burdzy's chapter presents with clarity the late-medieval Church's total vision of preparations for death. She discusses briefly more or less all of the various acts to be undertaken before or after death as they were practiced in sixteenth-century Southern Polish towns. Naturally, there have been local and temporal variations in minutiae within the Western Roman Church, but Burdzy has here presented the main components of the doctrine and practice from the perspective of a range of different source materials. Thus, her article can serve as a key for opening doors for understanding even the other articles. Not only does Burdzy mention purgatory and funeral masses, but also indulgences, wills, intercession, ecclesiastical benefices, guilds, fraternities, convents, funeral sermons, as well as the possibility of interment in the church. She also deals in passing with the sacrament of penance. However, from a theological point of view, the starting point should be taken there.

Admittedly, this sacrament is not as obviously present in the existing source material as the other factors, but yet pivotal for understanding all the other elements described above. It played a crucial role in deathbed preparations. The first components of penance were genuine contrition and confession of one's sins to a priest who could grant absolution provided that amendment was promised and satisfaction made. Consequently, the priest prescribed the sinner penance for the atonement of the confessed sins. According to the theological thinking, performed penance eradicated the temporal punishment for sin in this life or beyond death in purgatory. This is why people as a rule wished to perform penance on their deathbeds, and thereafter to receive the eucharist and extreme unction.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Gustav Adolf Benrath, "Buße v. 2. Mittelalter," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 7 (Berlin, 1981), pp. 458–65.

Thus, the sacrament of penance compounded many different elements and at least the three first ones were ultimately confirmed by Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431–47) at the Council of Florence in 1439. More precisely, the components of penance were defined as heart-felt contrition (*contritio cordis*), confession to a priest (*confessio*) with following absolution (*absolutio*), as well as satisfaction (*satisfactio*) that the confessor imposed on the penitent and that had to be performed for the sacrament to have its full effect.<sup>7</sup> But if the sinner had not completed the penance, one could be cleansed in purgatory. Thereby, the theological development of the doctrine of purgatory came to influence every Christian's preparations for death, unless one died a sudden and unexpected death without having the foresight to take precautions for that possibility.

The thought of the cleansing effects of fire had a long history within the Church, but the doctrinal development did not mature until the twelfth century. During the following centuries the doctrine of purgatory was developed more fully so it could be defined in a dogmatic way at the Councils of Lyon (1274) and Florence (1439).<sup>8</sup> Even popular beliefs were tied to the doctrine of purgatory. These imagined a spectrum of horrifying and vivid torments of ice and water, storm and rain – not only flames. Even chastisement in hell and purgatory were seen as close connected and intertwined. Perceptions of hell lent purgatory, for example, the notion that volcanoes formed its entrance. Such ideas also influenced the Church's official doctrine and were partly integrated into it.<sup>9</sup> Finally, this led to criticism that made the Reformatory Churches refute the doctrine of purgatory in favour of grace (*sola gratia*).<sup>10</sup> Yet, the perceptions of purgatory contained hope. The purifying torments would eventually cease, and the souls undergoing the cleansing would be aided by various means one had procured during one's own lifetime as well as the voluntary or obligatory care of the living for the soul of the deceased.

From a liturgical perspective, it is well known how the Christian burial was performed in the Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> Many manuals, liturgical handbooks, that contained the burial rites, have survived until our days from the later-medieval

7 In general, see Benrath, "Buße v. 2. Mittelalter," pp. 458–65.

8 Ernst Koch, "Fegfeuer," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 11 (Berlin, 1983), pp. 69–74.

9 B. Deneke, "Fegfeuer," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 4 (Stuttgart, 1989), cols. 328–31.

10 Holsten Fagerberg, *Die Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften von 1529 bis 1537* (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 318–19. See also Koch, "Fegfeuer," pp. 74–75.

11 An overview of the rites for the preparation for death as well as the funeral rites is to be found in Bertil Nilsson, "Död och begravning: Begravningsskicket i Norden," in *Tanke och tro: Aspekter på medeltidens idévärld och fromhetsliv*, eds. Olle Ferm and Göran Tegnér, (Studier till Det medeltida Sverige) 3 (Stockholm: 1987), pp. 133–50.

Nordic countries.<sup>12</sup> The rites included elements that were interconnected with the preparations for death of the *moriens*. These were called *commendatio animae* and they contained intercessory prayers for the soul both during the act of dying and after death. Intercession was even one of the most pronounced features of the liturgy of the burial. The main *topos* of the prayers was pleading that the soul of the deceased be welcomed into paradise and at the Last Judgement be accepted to the group of the holy and select. However, what threatened the soul instead was being hurled into the eternal punishments awaiting in the abysses of hell. The doctrine of purgatory was not explicitly mentioned in these intercessory prayers despite its great importance in other aspects of an individual's preparations for death.<sup>13</sup>

The role of purgatory also formed the fundament of the memorial traditions of the Church and the individual that supplemented the universally human remembrance of one's dear departed ones. The eucharistic sacrifice and its effects on the souls of the dead in purgatory were essential for the theologically motivated and partly canonically regulated *memoria*. The doctrine of transubstantiation was confirmed by the Fourth Lateral Council of 1215. This entailed that the bread and wine of the eucharist were transformed into the body and blood of Christ during the mass. This doctrine gave theological support to the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice which in turn meant that the atonement of Christ was made present anew in the mass. Like the sacrifice of Christ at the cross at Golgotha came to benefit all humans, both alive and dead, the mass came to be interpreted similarly.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the mass was perceived as helping the souls of the dead in purgatory by alleviating their torments and shortening the duration of their stay there. A quantitative attitude to preparations for death came to prevail: the greater number of masses to be celebrated for a certain person or persons, the greater their positive and beneficial effect. This perception made it both possible and desirable to accumulate as many masses as possible to be celebrated for one's own soul or that of close family members. However, even the ordinary

12 Hilding Johansson, *Hemsjömanualen: En liturgi-historisk studie*, (Samlingar och studier till Svenska kyrkans historia) 24 (Stockholm, 1950) – the rites for *commendatio animae* and for the funeral, pp. 175–85; Olof Kolsrud and Helge Fæhn, eds., *Manuale Norvegicum (Presta handbók)*, (Libri liturgici provinciae Nidrosiensis medii aevi) 1 (Oslo, 1962) – the rites for *commendatio animae* and for the funeral, pp. 86–103; Knud Ottosen, ed., *The manual from Notmark. Gl. kgl. Saml. 3453, 8°*, (Bibliotheca liturgica Danica, Series Latina) 1 (Copenhagen, 1970) – the rites for *commendatio animae* and for the funeral, pp. 97–108.

13 Erwin Iserloh, "Abendmahl III/2 Mittelalter," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 1 (Berlin, 1977), pp. 91–93.

14 Iserloh, "Abendmahl III/2 Mittelalter," pp. 91–93.

mass celebrated on Sundays and feast days was important, because the prayer *Memento etiam* was said as an intercession for the souls in purgatory. During it, the priest could also name the persons on whose behalf he especially wanted to intercede.<sup>15</sup>

All in all, the doctrine of purgatory strengthened the role of masses for the dead. For example, the chapters on the Church in medieval Swedish provincial laws, containing canon law and representing agreements on the diocesan level between clergy and laity, determined on which days and how many masses for the souls of the deceased would be celebrated.<sup>16</sup> Thereby, even so-called ordinary people who might not donated anything particular to the Church had the right to a number of them.

The so-called anniversary, the mass for the soul on the anniversary of the death or funeral, said at least once, was included among these. The repeated anniversary for one and the same individual came to play an important role especially for the liturgical “lives” of cathedrals and abbey churches during the Later Middle Ages, because of the sometimes numerous and generous donations to these churches.<sup>17</sup>

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- 15 Angelus Albert Häussling, *Mönchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier: Eine Studie über die Messe in der abendländischen Klosterliturgie des frühen Mittelalters und zur Geschichte der Meßhäufigkeit*, (Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen) 58 (Münster, 1973), pp. 256–58; Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia: Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe* (Vienna, 1958), pp. 285–306. See also for instance, Christer Pahlmblad, ed., *Skarmissalet: Studier, edition, översättning och faksimil av handskriften i Skara Stifts- och Landsbibliotek* (Skara, 2006), nr. 197, p. 286.
  - 16 H.S. Collin and C.J. Schlyter, eds., *Yngre Västgötalagen*, Kyrkobalken [Chapter on the Church] 55, *Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar* [hereafter *ssGL*] 1 (Stockholm, 1827), p. 101; H.S. Collin and C.J. Schlyter, eds., *Östgötalagen*, Kyrkobalken 7 § 2, *ssGL* 2, (Stockholm, 1830), p. 8; C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Upplandslagen*, Kyrkobalken 8, *ssGL* 3, (Stockholm, 1834), pp. 34–37; C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Södermannalagen*, Kyrkobalken 11, *ssGL* 4, (Lund, 1838), pp. 30–32; C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Västmannalagen*, Kyrkobalken 7, *ssGL* 5, (Lund, 1841), pp. 89–91; C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Smålandslagen*, Kyrkobalken 7, *ssGL* 6, (Lund, 1844), pp. 102–03; C.J. Schlyter, ed., *Hälsingelagen*, Kyrkobalken 8, *ssGL* 6, (Lund, 1844), p. 9. See also Bertil Nilsson, *De sepulturis: Gravrätten i Corpus Iuris Canonici och i medeltida nordisk lagstiftning*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 44 (Stockholm, 1989), pp. 193–96.
  - 17 Bertil Nilsson, “Kleresi och lekfolk i gåvobokens anteckningar,” in *Mellan evighet och vardag: Lunds domkyrkas martyrologium Liber daticus vetustior (den äldre gåvoboken): Studier och faksimilutgåva*, ed. Eva Nilsson Nylander (Lund, 2015), pp. 171–73; Mattias Karlsson, *Konstruktionen av det heliga: Altarna i det medeltida Lunds stift*, (Skånsk senmedeltid och renässans: Skriftserie utgiven av Vetenskapssocieteten i Lund) 23 (Lund, 2015), pp. 180–88.

Although we know relatively little of the religious and spiritual lives of individuals belonging to the lower classes, one can assume that intercessions played an important role even for them. This can to a certain degree be connected to the encouragement for intercession for those who reposed in the churchyards of certain churches that were mentioned in the letters of indulgence granted by bishops. These were often only intended for a particular nominated church or monastery: by following the instructions in these letters, they not only benefited the souls of the deceased but also those of the praying people. A number of letters have been preserved with formulations of the type: "those who walk around this churchyard saying prayers for the deceased."<sup>18</sup>

The indulgence was also directly related to the sacrament of penance even if not directly to purgatory. The indulgence aimed at reducing penance through a momentary act whereby one was released from a part of the penance which had been imposed or the penance in its entirety. As time went by, the doctrine also came to include that such deeds could benefit souls in purgatory in order to cleanse them from their remaining penances. Their sojourn in purgatory would thereby be shortened. When indulgences were commercialised at the end of the Middle Ages, it gave rise to attacks from reformers on the same grounds as even masses for souls could be criticised. It was doubted whether money, buying indulgences and masses, really could convey spiritual advantages in this life and the next beyond death.<sup>19</sup>

The knowledge of the existence of such indulgences for various churches may have consoled those who made preparations for burial in a special churchyard or church. Moreover, they contributed to that the churchyards of some churches became more attractive choices for burial places. Wishes or demands for burial at particular nominated burial sites were usually expressed in wills, and relatively many have survived to our days even in the Nordic countries. Wills have been used in some of the articles to elucidate a number of aspects related to preparations for death. In addition, they are good sources for even other types of approaches involving medieval political and social history.<sup>20</sup>

18 See, for instance, *Avlatsbrev från Västgötadeln av Skara stift*, ed. Johnny Hagberg, (Skara stiftshistoriska sällskaps skriftserie) 25 (Skara, 2006), nr. 17, pp. 104–05, where "Pater noster" and "Ave Maria" are mentioned among the prayers to be said: "[...] *ac eciam qui eiusdem ecclesie cimiterium pro ibidem quiescentibus et omnibus fidelibus [...] defunctis vnum Pater noster et vnam Ave Maria legendo et dicendo circumierint [...]*."

19 Carl-Gustaf Andrén, "Avlatsbrev från Västgötadeln av Skara stift," in *Avlatsbrev från Västgötadeln av Skara stift*, ed. Johnny Hagberg, (Skara stiftshistoriska sällskaps skriftserie) 25 (Skara, 2006), pp. 9–13; on medieval criticism of indulgences, see Gustav Adolf Benrath, "Ablass," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 1 (Berlin, 1977), pp. 351–53.

20 On Swedish last wills, see, Anna Waško, *Frömmighet und Ritteridee im Lichte der schwedischen ritterlichen Testamente aus dem 14. Jahrhundert: Zur Verbreitung des Testaments und*

The choice of burial place was an important component of wills – especially those made by the elite. It was connected to the possibility to have masses for the soul and intercessions – occasionally in very high numbers. One's final resting place as, for instance, inside the church building formed part of this service package.

The privilege to be buried in the church was originally reserved for bishops and those members of the clergy who had served at the altar. With time, this possibility to have their final resting place there was extended to the benefactors of the church, especially those patrons (*patroni*) of the church who had contributed to building it. In the High and Late Middle Ages, it became increasingly common that persons who could afford the necessary payments were entered in the sacred space of the church. Consequently, those church buildings to which a great number of priests were connected became the most attractive because of the number of masses that could be celebrated and intercessory prayers that could be recited for the soul of the deceased.<sup>21</sup>

But even parish churches in the countryside came to house the remains of the dead. One example of this – very unusual of its kind in Sweden – is the grave that can be seen in the church of Västeråker outside Uppsala. There, Lady Ramborg Israelsdotter [And] (d. after 1327) of the Castle of Vik, belonging to one of the most aristocratic families of the time, is buried under a copper slab in a niche in the north wall of the choir. For this burial site, she had had the church built in 1331. In addition, she had donated land to the priest so that he would celebrate a weekly mass for her soul in all eternity and for the parish clerk (Sw. *klockare*, lit. bell-ringer) for ringing the bells at these weekly masses.<sup>22</sup>

Cindy Wood's study of Bishop William Wykeham of Winchester in this volume demonstrates very well that not all preparations for death took place as one event witnessed by priest, family, and friends at the end of one's life. Thanks to his elevated position in the Church and the economic means at his disposal, Wykeham embarked on a series of activities ranging over several decades to ensure that he would be remembered forever as he had monks of the cathedral say no less than three daily masses. However, even Bishop William's

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*des Testamentsbegriffs in Schweden*, (Zeszyty naukowe uniwersytetu jagiellońskiego 99, Prace historyczne) 120 (Krakow, 1996).

21 On interments in church buildings from a legal point of view, see Nilsson, *De sepulturis*, pp. 155–65; Bertil Nilsson, "Den tidiga medeltidens likbegängelse och begravningsbruk i Västkyrkan," in *Från hedniskt till kristet: Förändringar i begravningsbruk och gravskick i Skandinavien c:a 800–1200*, ed. Bertil Nilsson (Stockholm, 2010), pp. 44–45.

22 Gunnar Smedberg, *Västeråkers kyrka*, (Upplands kyrkor) 77A (Uppsala, 1980), pp. 12–15 with photos.

wealth and any precautions he may have taken did not guarantee that he would be remembered forever through masses and intercessions as the Reformation put an end to these regarding these as arising from "blindness and ignorance." By contrast, the material remains of his preparations for death in the form of two colleges and the nave of Winchester Cathedral still exist. Like Bishop William Wykeham's material arrangements for his memory remain, also the monuments of Lady Ramborg – the church building and the inscriptions on her grave – have survived until our days. However, the theological basis of which these are expressions lost their relevance in both countries in the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Especially in cathedrals and abbey churches, one can even today see many grave-slabs under which people who had by choosing to be buried in that sacred location prepared for death through donations or wills. One of the medieval Swedish provincial laws, the so-called Younger Law of West Gothia (*Yngre Västgötalagen*), contains regulations of the fee for such a burial place.<sup>23</sup> This probably ought to be interpreted so that it was not completely unheard that even members of the peasantry, not only members of the upper class, had a real possibility to have their final resting place in their parish churches, unless one belonged to the poorest segments.

Especially from the High Middle Ages on, fraternities and guilds were established to ease preparations for death even if the phenomenon itself is older. Although the records are not always very easy to interpret and the demarcation line between the two types of associations is occasionally hazy, one of their functions was to help their members to the grave and ensure that masses were said for the souls of deceased brothers and sisters. Guilds with members from different trades and professions including even priests, although more commonly called confraternities (*confraternitates*, *sodalitia*, or *convivia*), were established mainly in towns, but also to a smaller extent in the countryside. Perhaps burghers rather than peasants lived more as independent individuals. Consequently, they may have needed in a greater extent the aid that guilds could provide helping to prepare for the last stage of life. They also assisted with remembrance by financing masses for the soul and intercessory prayers.<sup>24</sup> In peasant society, this aid was apparently given by the closest relatives.

23 Collin and Schlyter, eds., *Yngre Västgötalagen*, Kyrkobalken 55, *SSGL* 1, p. 88.

24 Jarl Gallén, "Brödraskap," in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 2 (Copenhagen, 1957), cols. 303–06; Christoph Anz, "Gildernes form og funksjon i middelalderens Skandinavia," in *Gilder, lav og broderskaber i middelalderens Danmark*, eds. Lars Bisgaard and Leif Søndergaard (Odense, 2002), pp. 21–40; Stina Fallberg Sundmark, "Gillen i svensk medeltid: Organiserad gemenskap för levande och döda," in *Doften av rykande veckor*:

However, the guilds were largely abolished within the sphere of the Evangelical Churches.<sup>25</sup>

With the Lutheran (and Reformed) theology, the notions of the sacraments changed radically, and with them, the practices related to them that in some respects were harshly condemned by the reformers. This also encompassed those related to death, especially the masses for the dead. On the Catholic side, instead, the medieval doctrines were confirmed by the Counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545–63).<sup>26</sup>

The sacrament of penance that formed the basis of many of the death-related preparations – as has been discussed above – as well as the memorial tradition acquired new meaning. When penance and atonement were discussed in the fundamental Lutheran doctrinal milepost, the Confession of Augsburg of 1530, they were considered to have two main components: (1) remorse when one realised that one had sinned, and (2), faith in the forgiveness of sins that gave the conscience solace and peace. Thus, it differed considerably from the perception of the tripartite elements of penance that had been established in the fifteenth century. The Reformers underlined that good deeds were *fruits* of penance, not part of it. Grace could not be deserved by good deeds and remedies. Indeed, performing penitential deeds were even seen as a threat against the thought of salvation through faith alone (*sola fide*). Instead of forming a particular period, penance was considered to encompass the whole Christian life.<sup>27</sup>

This meant, therefore, that a person could not have any remaining penance to perform that the soul had to be cleansed from by suffering in purgatory.

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*Reformationen ur folkets perspektiv*, eds. Fredrik Heiding S.J. and Magnus Nyman (Skellefteå 2016), pp. 111–36.

25 Lars Bisgaard, “Gilderne og reformationen: Husum,” in *Gilder, lav og broderskaber i midtaldens Danmark*, eds. Lars Bisgaard and Leif Søndergaard (Odense, 2002), pp. 257–87; Håkon Haugland, “To help the deceased guild brother to his grave’: Guilds, Death and Funeral Arrangements in Late Medieval and Early Modern Norway, ca. 1300–1900,” *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), available online at [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154768/07\\_h%C3%A5kon\\_final\\_2.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/154768/07_h%C3%A5kon_final_2.pdf?sequence=1), accessed 25 Aug. 2017, pp. 153–55.

26 Ottfried Jordahn, “Die Bestattung,” in *Handbuch der Liturgik: Liturgiewissenschaft in Theologie und Praxis der Kirche*, eds. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber and Karl-Heinrich Bieritz (Leipzig, 1995), pp. 420–21.

27 Confessio Augustana article 12; Leif Grane, *Confessio Augustana med noter och kommentarer: Orientering i den lutherska reformationens grundtankar* (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 110–20; Fagerberg, *Die Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, pp. 216–37.



The reformed parish priest would not have imposed any on him or her. In addition, the Lutheran reformers considered that the doctrine of purgatory ran counter to the testimony of the Bible that faith alone sufficed for salvation. Consequently, the doctrine as well as the interconnected custom to say masses for the dead were abandoned. The Symbolic Books from the 1530s that laid the foundation of Lutheranism thereby brought the medieval tradition of remembering the dead to an end. It also came to alter the medieval preparations for death.<sup>28</sup>

Some sort of preparation seems still to have been a fundamental phenomenon among Christians also keeping the more mundane and worldly preparations in mind. As the chapters of Otfried Czaika, Anu Lahtinen, and Riikka Miettinen demonstrate, people made preparations in anticipation of death even after the new Churches were founded as a consequence of reformed evangelical theology.

Also the memorial tradition survived, but in new formats. Funeral sermons became one of the central traditions here. That a funeral sermon or an “exhortation” (*förmaning*) was to be preached if the number of funeral guests was large was mentioned in the important Swedish Church Ordinance of 1571 by Archbishop Laurentius Petri of Uppsala (archep. 1531–73). This section distances itself from the medieval burial rites and thereby also interlinked doctrines and practices.<sup>29</sup> Especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this type of remembrance became an important way of honouring the deceased. The longer the funeral sermon lasted, the more honour it brought. Several of the articles in this volume demonstrate that funeral sermons can be used for studies with a number of different approaches. As many of them were printed, they not only belonged to the funeral act itself, but were also part and parcel of the evangelical Lutheran Church’s memorial tradition. At the same time, it is obvious that there are some methodological difficulties when using them as source material for individual preparations for death – as Otfried Czaika has indicated in his chapter in this volume. The task of the priest was hardly to say anything negative on the topic in this connection.

Finally, also epitaphs and funerary hatchments, i.e., coats of arms displayed at funerals (Ger. *Totenschild*), can be mentioned as examples of how the *memoria*-tradition lived on, but in a different form in evangelical Churches even if this present volume does not discuss them further. Epitaphs became common in the evangelical realms during the sixteenth and seventeenth

28 Fagerberg, *Die Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, pp. 318–19.

29 Sven Kjällerström, ed., *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning* (Lund, 1971), p. 136.

centuries. Funerary hatchments that were carried in the burial procession became customary among the nobility, and after the interment, they were hung up on the church wall or churches' family chapels (*gravkor*). A great number of such seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coats of arms have survived and were specifically customary in Sweden and some Swedish territories in the Baltic Sea Region.<sup>30</sup> Both kinds of funeral monuments can naturally also be used for studying how people anticipated and prepared for death.

Like most types of sources that elucidate the evangelical tradition of remembrance in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, both last categories were related – just like the surviving funerary sermons – to persons in the absolute top echelons of society. They can be found among the nobility, the upper strata of burghers, priests, and officers. How the ordinary peasant – at least as interesting as members of the elite – prepared him- or herself for death in the early modern period remains largely in the dark, as long as we are looking for concrete individual cases unless they have been documented in court cases and legal documents. Hitherto, however, this has only taken place in a very limited extent. Thus, despite the difficulties, it is a desideratum for future research to attempt to approach these people who have left fewer traces in the sources, and consequently nearly disappear in historical research, also with regard to their experiences of preparations for death.<sup>31</sup>

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30 See the short entries in *Nationalencyklopedin* s.v. "*epitafium*" and "*begravningsvapen*." Although there is no comprehensive study of these phenomena in Sweden, they are mentioned and analysed in a large number of individual descriptions of church buildings.

31 This article has been translated from the original Swedish by Mia Korpiola.



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# Index

- Absolution 8, 18, 27, 66, 84, 89–90, 160,  
 177 fn. 64, 190–91 (*See also* confession;  
 penance)  
 account books 68–69, 96, 101, 103  
 acts of mercy 45, 48–49, 57, 59 (*See also*  
 charity; paupers; prayer; prisoners)  
 Adderley (Abberley), Oxfordshire 58  
 adultery 84–87, 93, 160, 169  
 alms, *See* charity; paupers  
 altar 9–10, 50–51, 111–14, 116, 122, 195  
 Andreas Magni Julinus, *See* Julinus, Andreas  
 Magni  
 anger 25, 29, 31–37, 39–40, 42–43  
 Anna Banér, *See* Banér Anna  
 Anna Lewenhaupt, *See* Lewenhaupt, Anna  
 Anna Margareta Sture, *See* Sture, Anna  
 Margareta  
 Anna Sture, *See* Sture, Anna  
 Anne of York, Duchess of Exeter  
 (1439–76) 51  
 anniversary, *See* mass  
 anxiety 3, 15–16, 86, 161–63, 168, 172–73,  
 184–85  
 Arboga 67–69, 71–72, 78  
 Arnkell (*Eyrbyggja saga*) 29–32, 36–37, 41  
*ars moriendi* 3–9, 13–17, 27–28, 66–67, 83,  
 89–93, 101, 104, 115, 124–28, 130–31, 140,  
 144, 146, 153, 175, 177, 181–82, 185, 189  
*ars moriendi* literature 27, 66, 90–91, 93,  
 126 (*See also*, Gerson, Jean; Landskron,  
 Stephan von; Rhegius, Urbanus)  
 assault, *See* homicide  
 atonement, *See* penance  
 Augustine of Hippo, Saint (354–430) 25 fn.  
 22, 121  
 Augustinians 36 fn. 72, 52, 58, 90, 114  
  
 Bååt, Ebba, Swedish noblewoman  
 (1587–1630) 128  
 Bad Wilsnak 74  
 Baltic region 39 fn. 84, 96, 166, 199  
 Banér, Anna, Swedish noblewoman 138–39  
 Banér, Gustav, Swedish nobleman  
 (1547–1600) 138–41  
 baptism 11, 89 fn. 99, 153–59, 176 fn. 59  
  
 Beaufort, Henry, Cardinal, Bishop of  
 Winchester (ep. 1404–47) 59  
 Becket, Thomas (1118–70), Saint, Archbishop  
 of Canterbury 112  
 benefice, *See* predatory  
 Bergen 96  
 Bielke, Elena, Countess (1592–1651) 132–33,  
 140  
 Bielke, Erik Turesson (1564–99) 127, 129–30  
 Bielke, Hogenskild (1538–1605) 129, 140  
*Björköarätten* 76, 96  
 Black Death 45, 47, 49, 52, 54, 57, 62–63 (*See*  
*also* illness)  
 Bochnia 114  
 Bouke, John, Warden of New College, Oxford  
 (in office 1403–29) 60  
 Brandenburg 74  
 Brantingham, Thomas, Bishop of Exeter  
 (d. 1394) 49  
 Brigittines 10  
 Bromma 153  
 Buckingham, John, bishop of Lincoln  
 (d. 1399) 49  
 Bugenhagen, Johannes, reformer  
 (1485–1558) 154  
 burial 2, 6–7, 12, 14–16, 18–19, 27–28, 30–31,  
 50, 52, 54, 60, 83, 99, 110, 113, 117, 120–21,  
 126, 160–163, 174, 176–80, 185, 187–88,  
 191–92, 194–95, 198–99  
 cremation 30, 36, 160–61, 178  
 deviant burial 15, 36, 38, 40, 160–61  
 in church 52, 54, 60, 113, 117, 120–22, 136,  
 161, 195–97, 199  
 in unconsecrated ground 83, 160, 162,  
 176, 178–79  
 infant burial 12–13, 155  
 reburial 30–31, 83  
 ship burial 28  
  
 Calvinism 109, 119, 155 fn. 48, 167 fn. 19  
 Cambridgeshire 58, 61–62  
 canon law 6, 60, 66–67, 82, 89, 94, 98–101,  
 103, 192–93  
 Canterbury 55  
 catechism 10, 112, 148, 152



- Catholicism 1–12, 21–22, 27, 35–37, 41, 44–67, 89–97, 100–23, 158, 167–68, 174–77, 185–97
- chantry 9, 44–45, 49–56, 59–64
- Chantry Acts (Henry VIII, 1545 and Edward VI, 1547) 53, 61, 64
- charity 56, 62, 64, 111, 119, 123 (*See also* acts of mercy; paupers; prayer; prisoners)
- Charles IX, King of Sweden (r. 1604–11), *See* Karl of Södermanland
- childbirth 85–88, 93, 102, 146
- children 11–13, 26, 54, 69, 86–88, 89 fn. 99, 93, 112, 128, 138, 140, 146, 148, 151–57, 176 fn. 59, 177 fn. 62, 183
- Christianisation 1–3, 5–6, 18, 21–22, 36, 41, 187–89
- Church Ordinance of 1571, Swedish 91, 162 fn. 9, 171 fn. 33, 179 fn. 67, 198
- Claus Hastver, *See* Hastver, Claus
- Clement VI, Pope (r. 1342–51) 57
- cleric, *See* priest
- coat of arms 51, 121, 128, 136, 198–99
- communion 16, 18, 27, 66, 68, 89–91, 109, 116, 144–45, 148–49, 154, 158, 160, 169, 175–77, 181–82, 185–86
- communio sanctorum* 117, 153
- confession 1, 5–6, 8, 10–11, 16, 38, 43, 57, 65–104, 109, 116, 134, 144–45, 149, 154, 158–60, 167, 169, 171, 175–77, 181–83, 185–86, 189–91 (*See also* penance; absolution)
- confessor 73, 78, 81, 89–91, 101, 190–91
- confraternity, *See* fraternity
- convents, *See* monastery
- Cornelius Marci, pastor in Nürnberg (d. 1646) 149
- credit, *See* debt
- Cringelius, Enoch Haqvini, vicar (1559–1632) 171 fn. 33, 173 fn. 48, 176 fn. 57, 177
- crucifix 97–98, 137
- damnation 1, 15, 87, 89, 102, 104, 106, 157, 162, 168, 174, 177, 191–92
- Day of Judgement, *See* Last Judgement
- death penalty, *See* execution
- deathbed confessions, *See* confession
- debt 10–11, 66–71, 95–99, 101–02, 104, 108–09
- decapitation, *See* execution
- demonic influence, *See* Devil
- depression, *See* melancholy
- despair 15, 162–63, 167–75, 177, 179 fn. 67, 183–84
- Devil 87, 93, 145, 168, 170–72, 177
- Devon 57
- devotion, *See* piety
- Djäk'n, Henrik Klasson, nobleman (1400–58) 10
- Downton (Dounton), Wiltshire 58
- Ebba Bååt, *See* Bååt, Ebba
- Ebba Gustavsdotter Stenbock, *See* Stenbock, Ebba Gustavsdotter
- Ebba Stenbock, *See* Stenbock, Ebba
- Edington, William, bishop of Winchester (ep. 1346–66) 46, 54
- educational institutions, *See* Eton College; New College; St. Mary's College; Winchester College
- Edward I (r. 1272–1307) 50
- Edward III, King of England (r. 1327–77) 46, 52–53, 56
- Edward IV, King of England (r. 1461–83) 51, 53
- Edward VI, King of England (r. 1547–53) 56, 61, 63–64
- Elena Bielke, *See* Bielke, Elena
- Eler, Johann, doctor (1597–1628) 13
- England 44–64, 88, 97, 101, 161 fn. 6
- Enoch Haqvini Cringelius, *See* Cringelius, Enoch Haqvini
- epidemics, *See* illness
- epitaph 9, 121–22, 198 (*See also* gravestone)
- Erasmus of Rotterdam, humanist (1469–1536) 119–20
- Erik Falck, *See* Falck, Erik
- Erik Puke, *See* Puke, Erik
- Erik Turesson Bielke, *See* Bielke, Erik Turesson
- Essen, Theodor von, preacher 150
- Eton College 61–62
- Eucharist, *See* communion
- execution 10, 13–14, 16, 67, 77, 83–86, 102, 125 fn. 4, 129, 134–40, 177, 182 fn. 79, 185–86
- executioner 13, 75, 85, 135, 160–61, 170 fn. 29
- extreme unction 1, 8, 66, 89, 109, 166, 182, 190
- Eyrbyggja saga* 19, 23, 29–37, 40

- Falck, Erik, bishop of Linköping (d. 1570) 86, 156
- famine 166, 180
- Färla, Orestes Keldorsson, nobleman (d. 1299) 99
- fear of death 3, 9, 84, 86–88, 105, 118, 161–63, 168, 172–73, 175, 184
- feoffees 50
- fetus 12, 86, 88, 146, 151, 153–57
- Finland 6 fn. 11, 79, 130, 133–36, 142 fn. 1, 143, 166, 180 (*See also* Sweden)
- Fleming, Gertrud (1665–73) 127
- Fleming, Henrik, nobleman (1584–1650) 11, 128
- Fleming, Johan (d. 1599) 133–38, 140–41, 182
- Fleming, Katarina 134
- Fleming, Klas, Baron (c. 1535–97) 128 fn. 16, 130–31, 133–34, 136, 141
- folk beliefs 2–3, 15, 18, 22–23, 24 fn. 22, 28 fn. 37, 175, 188, 191
- fornication 92–93
- Fóstbræðra saga* 31, 33
- Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire 57
- Fourth Lateran Council [1215] 47, 89
- France 8, 46, 53, 64, 75, 161 fn. 6
- Franciscans 73, 111
- fraternity 63, 108, 114–16, 122, 190, 196
- Freising 75
- Fromond, John (d. 1420) 60
- funeral biography, *See* obituary
- funeral sermons, *See* sermons
- funerals, *See* burial
- Geneva 172
- Genoa 98
- Germany 12–13, 70, 75–76, 95–97, 100, 147, 149–50, 154
- Gerson, Jean, French theologian (1363–1429) 3, 90–91, 126
- Gertrud Fleming, *See* Fleming, Gertrud
- ghosts, *See* restless dead
- Good Death, *See* ars moriendi
- Gotland 76
- grace 1, 4, 14, 92, 122–23, 126, 131, 146, 148–49, 151–52, 154, 156, 158–59, 169, 176–77, 179, 183, 185, 191, 197
- gravestone 120–21, 128, 195–96 (*See also* epitaph)
- greed 37, 39, 43
- Gregory the Great, Pope (c. 540–604) 25 fn. 22, 29 fn. 37, 106
- grief, *See* sorrow
- Grubbe, Lorentz, officer (d. 1642) 150
- guilds 63, 73, 110, 113–15, 117, 122, 190, 196–97 (*See also* fraternities)
- Gustav Banér, *See* Banér, Gustav
- Gustav I Vasa, King of Sweden (r. 1523–60) 128
- Gustav II Adolf, King of Sweden (r. 1611–32) 143
- Gyllenstierna, Nils, Baron (1526–1601) 129
- Habermann, Johannes (1516–90) 156
- Hamburg 75, 96
- Hampshire 45, 47, 52, 55, 59
- Hannibal Wrangel, *See* Wrangel, Hannibal
- Hanseatic League 96, 100
- Harmonsworth (Hermondesworth), Middlesex 58
- Hastver, Claus, nobleman 149
- hatchments, *See* coat of arms
- haunting, *See* restless dead
- heaven, *See* salvation
- Hel, Norse goddess of death 2
- hell, *See* damnation
- Henrik Fleming, *See* Fleming, Henrik
- Henrik Klasson Djäkn, *See* Djäkn, Henrik Klasson
- Henry Beaufort, *See* Beaufort, Henry
- Henry IV, King of England (r. 1399–1413) 47, 59
- Henry VI, King of England (r. 1422–61 and 1470–71) 61–62
- Henry VIII, King of England (r. 1509–47) 56, 63–64
- Hogenskild Bielke, *See* Bielke, Hogenskild
- homicide 10–11, 13, 16, 65, 67, 72–83, 102–04, 177, 186
- hospitals 48, 108, 110–11, 116
- Hrappr (*Laxdæla saga*) 37–43
- Hungary 98
- Hvit, Laurentius, priest 85–86
- hymn 152, 173 fn. 48
- Iceland 5–8, 18–43, 188–89
- Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*) 5–7, 18–43, 188
- illegitimacy 41 fn. 94, 71, 93, 136

- illness 3, 18, 20 fn. 6, 52, 57, 62, 66, 78–79, 81, 88, 90, 94, 120, 130, 144–45, 147, 166, 172, 178 fn. 67, 180–82
- indulgence 106, 116, 189–90, 194
- inheritance 2, 25–26, 28–29, 42, 69–71, 92–94, 101, 136, 161
- intercession 3–5, 8–9, 11, 44–64, 92, 105, 108–09, 116, 120, 122, 125–26, 129, 158, 173, 175, 190, 192–96
- internment, *See* prisoners
- Isidore of Seville, Saint (560–636) 106
- Íslendingasögur*, *See* Icelandic Family Sagas
- Jean Gerson, *See* Gerson, Jean
- Johan Fleming, *See* Fleming, Johan
- Johan Munster, *See* Munster, Johan
- Johan Skytte, *See* Skytte Johan
- Johann Eler, *See* Eler, Johann
- Johannes Bugenhagen, *See* Bugenhagen Johannes
- Johannes Habermann, *See* Habermann, Johannes
- John Bouke, *See* Bouke, John
- John Buckingham, *See* Buckingham, John
- John Fromond, *See* Fromond, John
- John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (ep. 1327–69) 57–58
- Jonas Benedicti Rudberus, priest (1594–1675) 153–55, 157
- Julinus, Andreas Magni (d. 1674) 146–48
- Katarina Fleming, *See* Fleming, Katarina
- Karelia 39 fn. 84, 166
- Karl of Södermanland, Duke (1550–1611), King Charles IX of Sweden (r. 1604–11) 130, 134, 138
- Katarina Fleming, *See* Fleming, Katarina
- King Christopher's Law 161
- King Magnus Eriksson's Law for the Country-side [ca. 1350, Swedish] 66–68, 77, 82
- King Magnus Eriksson's Town Law [ca. 1350, Swedish] 66–68, 77, 82–84, 95–97
- King Magnus Hakonarsson's Town Law 96–97
- Klas Fleming, *See* Fleming, Klas
- Krakow 106–07, 109–10, 112, 114, 121
- Last Judgement 7–8, 45, 47, 66–67, 89, 101, 120, 137, 157, 192
- last rites, *See* confession; communion; extreme unction
- last wishes, *See* wills
- Laurbecchius, Petrus, professor of Theology, University of Turku (1628–1705) 180
- Laurentius Hvit, *See* Hvit, Laurentius
- Laurentius Laurinus, *See* Laurinus, Laurentius
- Laurinus, Laurentius priest (c. 1573–1655/56) 151–52
- Law of Dalarna 78
- Law of East Gothia 89 fn. 99
- Law of Södermanland 77
- Law of Uppland 89, 100
- Law of West Gothia 196
- Laxdæla saga* 19, 23–29, 37–43
- Leger, Thomas St. (c. 1440–83) 51
- Lewenhaupt, Anna (1558–99) 127
- licence to alienate land, *See* Mortmain
- limbo 11, 157
- Linköping 86, 138–39, 143, 156
- Lithuania 2, 106, 109, 111, 119, 122
- liturgical calendar 112–13, 115–16, 122
- liturgy 9, 52, 55, 57, 113, 122, 191–93 (*See also* mass)
- Livonia 133, 166
- Lödöse 70, 76 fn. 45
- Lord's Supper, *See* communion
- Lords Appellant 46, 59
- Lorentz Grubbe, *See* Grubbe, Lorentz
- Lübeck 76, 95–96, 100
- Lublin 106, 112, 121
- Lucia Olofsdotter Skälge, *See* Skälge, Lucia Olofsdotter
- Lüneburg 13
- Luther, Martin, reformer 84, 124, 154, 156, 158, 172, 177
- Lutheranism 4, 14–16, 83–84, 88, 104, 109, 124–25, 128, 132, 137, 142, 145, 151, 155, 157–59, 162–63, 166–69, 175, 182–85, 187, 197–98
- Lutheran confessionalism 15, 157–59, 166, 184
- Lutheran orthodoxy 15, 163, 166, 175 fn. 55
- magic, *See* witchcraft
- Margareta Hansdotter (d. 1624) 153, 155
- Lagunda 178
- Landnámabók* 28

- Maria Lothigia (d. 1647) 151–52  
 Martin Luther, *See* Luther, Martin  
 mass 8–10, 44–46, 48, 50–56, 59–64, 105,  
 108–18, 122, 128, 189–90, 192–98  
 (*See also* chantry)  
 medicine 13, 33–34, 60, 75–77, 143, 164  
 melancholy 15, 168, 171, 173, 174 fn. 49,  
 178–79  
 memory of the dead 9–10, 29, 38–40, 51,  
 56, 105–06, 117–18, 120–21, 125, 128–29,  
 135–36, 138–39, 141, 188–89, 192, 195–96,  
 198–99  
 items of remembrance 129, 136, 138–39  
 mental illness, *See* melancholy; anxiety  
 Middlesex 58  
 midwife 85–88  
 monastery 10, 36 fn. 72, 44, 50, 52–57, 62, 64,  
 99–100, 111, 116–19, 121, 190, 194  
*mors beata*, *See* *ars moriendi*  
 Mortmain 50, 58–59, 62  
 Munster, Johan, professor of philosophy,  
 University of Turku (d. 1714) 180  
 mural 89, 121
- Naantali 10  
 Nådendal, *See* Naantali  
 necrology (*liber mortuorum*), *See* obituary  
 New College, Oxford 44, 49, 52–53, 56–58,  
 60–61  
 Nils Gyllenstierna, *See* Gyllenstierna, Nils  
 Nils Sture, *See* Sture, Nils  
 Northamptonshire 57  
 Norway 96, 166  
 Nowy Sącz 111  
 Nürnberg 149  
 Nydala 99
- oath 53, 61, 67–69, 71–72, 74, 77–78, 81–82,  
 84, 96–98, 103  
 obit, *See* mass (*See also* chantry)  
 obituary 4, 13, 117–18, 124–25, 127, 130, 134,  
 141, 143, 147, 157, 175  
 Óláfr feilan (*Laxdæla saga*) 25–26, 29  
 Olaus Petri, Swedish reformer (1493–1552)  
 83–84  
 Olof Klasson, illegitimate son of Klas  
 Fleming 136  
 omen of death 2–3  
 oral tradition 21–22, 67, 97–104
- Order of the Garter 53  
 Orestes Keldorsson Färla, *See* Färla, Orestes  
 Keldorsson  
 Ottery St. Mary, Devon 57, 61  
 Oxfordshire 58
- Painting 12–13, 139 (*See also* mural)  
 pastor, *See* priest (*See also* confessor)  
 Patent Rolls 50, 58  
 paupers 9, 48–49, 55–57, 63, 77, 108, 111, 137  
 Peder Laurentii, pastor (d. 1648) 146–48,  
 165 fn. 13  
 penance 1, 5, 8, 16, 66, 73, 89–91, 106, 110, 167,  
 170, 175, 177, 182, 185, 189–91, 194, 197  
 perjury 102, 160  
*personalia*, *See* obituary  
 pestilence, *See* illness  
 Petrus Laurbecchius, *See* Laurbecchius,  
 Petrus  
 Philippa Klasdotter, illegitimate daughter of  
 Klas Fleming 136  
 Picardy 75, 80  
 pietism 167  
 piety 3–4, 10–11, 13–15, 44, 47, 66, 118–19,  
 126–27, 131–33, 137–38, 140–41, 144, 148,  
 158, 164–65, 167, 170 fn. 29, 171, 173–75,  
 176 fn. 56, 178–79
- pilgrimage 73–74  
 plague, *See* illness; Black Death  
 Poland 5–6, 9, 29, 39, 105–23, 134, 190  
 Pomerania 166  
 prayer 1, 14–15, 48, 50, 86, 94, 116–17, 126,  
 132–33, 137–38, 144–45, 148, 152, 155–56,  
 173–74, 180 fn. 72, 182–83, 185, 192, 194  
 prayer for the dead 8–9, 29, 38, 45, 47–51,  
 53, 55–56, 59–61, 63–64, 105–06, 109,  
 112, 115–18, 120, 122–23, 189, 192–96
- pre-Christian 1–3, 5, 18–43, 187–89  
 predicator 9, 111–12  
 pregnancy 85–87, 156  
 priest 3, 5, 9, 14–17, 46, 50–53, 55, 57–60, 71,  
 78–81, 83, 85–87, 89–94, 98, 100, 104,  
 111–16, 126, 134, 137, 146–47, 149, 151, 153,  
 169–71, 174–78, 179 fn. 67, 181–83, 185,  
 187, 190–91, 193, 195–96, 198–99 (*See  
 also* confessor)
- prisoners 48–49, 62, 134–36, 139, 180–81  
 procedural law, *See* oath; witness  
 procession 115, 120, 122, 199

- Protestantism, *See* Reformation; Lutheran-ism; Calvinism
- provincial laws, Swedish, *See* Law of Dalarna, Law of Uppland
- psalms 56, 110, 132, 138, 145, 148, 151–52, 173
- Puke, Erik, nobleman (d. 1437) 84–85
- purgatory 3–4, 8, 11, 44–45, 47–48, 62–64, 105–06, 112, 115–16, 119, 122, 126, 133, 157, 189–94, 197–98
- reconciliation 1, 72–73, 77, 79, 91–93, 102, 129
- Reformation 1, 4, 6, 10–11, 47, 83, 92, 104, 125–26, 129, 133, 154, 167–69, 174–75, 186–87, 190–91, 194, 196–99
- relics 74, 81, 97–98, 103, 120
- repentance, *See* confession; penance
- restless dead 5, 7–8, 18–23, 29–43
- resurrection 43, 122, 133, 150, 157–58, 179, 185
- revenants, *See* restless dead
- Rhegius, Urbanus, reformer (1489–1541) 126
- Richard II, King of England (r. 1377–99) 46–47, 56, 59
- Roman law 82, 95, 100–01, 103
- Rotheley, William (d. 1464) 49
- saints 10, 25 fn. 22, 29 fn. 37, 31, 42 fn. 95, 108–10, 112–15, 120–22
- salvation 1, 3–5, 8–9, 11, 13–18, 29, 42–43, 66, 83 fn. 72, 84, 90, 92–93, 104–06, 108–09, 111, 122, 128, 131, 137, 147–49, 154–55, 157, 162–64, 167–71, 173–74, 176–86, 189, 197–98
- Samuel Benedictus Hamarinus, priest (d. 1665) 153
- Sandomierz 106, 109–10, 112, 120–21
- Santiago de Compostela 74
- sermons 1, 4–6, 13–14, 112, 117–19, 124, 127, 129–30, 132–33, 142–59, 167 fn. 17, 172 fn. 41, 175, 190, 198–99
- settlement, *See* reconciliation
- sexual crime, *See* adultery; fornication
- Sibbo (fn. Sipoo) 79
- Sigismund, King of Sweden (r. 1592–99) 130, 134
- Sigrid Sture, *See* Sture, Sigrid
- Simon Starowolski, *See* Starowolski, Simon
- Skälge, Lucia Olofsdotter, noblewoman 10
- Skänninge 85
- Skedvi 170
- Skytte, Johan, nobleman (1577–1645) 84
- slander 72
- sola fide* (*See also* Reformation) 4, 83 fn. 72, 92, 104, 122, 131, 169, 174, 183, 186, 197–98
- Somero 89
- sorrow 84, 86, 127–31, 134, 136–37, 139, 141, 163
- Southwick Priory 50, 52–53, 55–56, 62
- Spain 74, 161 fn. 6
- St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle 51, 53–54, 61–62
- St. Mary's College 57–59
- St. Swithun's Priory 44, 54–56, 58, 62
- Starowolski, Simon (1588–1656) 121
- Steeple Morden (Stepelmorden), Cambridgeshire 58
- Stenbock, Ebba Gustavsdotter, Baroness (d. 1614) 130–31, 134, 136
- Stephan von Landskron (Augustine canon) (c. 1412–77) 90
- Stockholm 11, 65, 67–70, 72–76, 79–80, 83–84, 86–87, 93–97, 132, 135–36, 143, 153, 160
- Stralsund 70, 150
- Sture, Anna (1541–95) 129
- Sture, Anna Margareta, noblewoman (1610–46) 144–45
- Sture, Nils, nobleman 85
- Sture, Sigrid, Countess (1538–1613) 127, 129–30
- sudden death 3–4, 9, 13–14, 20, 23, 29, 36–37, 42, 62, 105, 127, 130–33, 140, 144, 146–47, 149, 157, 159, 175–76, 191
- suffrage, *See* prayer for the dead
- suicide 3, 5, 13, 15–16, 23 fn. 15, 83 fn. 72, 146, 160–86
- Svartlösa 160
- Sweden 5–6, 10–12, 14–16, 29, 38, 65–104, 124–41, 142–59, 160–86, 190, 193, 194 fn. 20, 195–96, 198–99
- Ten Articles of 1536 64
- Ten Commandments 90, 94, 161, 177
- theft 70, 84, 93
- Thirty Years' War 147
- Thomas Becket, *See* Becket, Thomas
- Thomas Brantingham, *See* Brantingham, Thomas

- Thomas St. Leger *See* Leger, Thomas St.  
 Þórólfr bægifótr (*Eyrbyggja saga*) 23, 29–37,  
 39–43  
 Tjust 79  
 Tönne Eriksson [Tott], *See* Tott, Tönne  
 Eriksson  
 Tott, Tönne Eriksson, nobleman  
 (1467–1522) 92  
 Turku (sw. Åbo) 134, 136, 143, 180
- ultima voluntas*, *See* wills  
 uncorrupted bodies 31  
 unexpected death, *See* sudden death  
 Unnr (*Laxdæla saga*) 23–29, 38, 42  
 Urbanus Rhegius, *See* Rhegius, Urbanus
- Vadstena 77, 91, 100  
 Valö 94  
 vanity of worldly concerns 4, 93, 127,  
 140, 154, 189  
 Västerås 72, 85, 99  
 Vendel 171  
*viaticum*, *See* extreme unction  
 vicar, *See* priest (*See also* confessor)  
 Vigdis, wife of Hrappr (*Laxdæla saga*)  
 38  
 Viking Age 18–43, 187–89  
 violent death, *See* homicide; execution  
 Visby, law of 76, 86 fn. 83, 97
- Wales 51, 63  
 Waynflete, William, Bishop of Winchester  
 (ep. 1447–86) 59
- Wieliczka 112, 114  
 William Edington, *See* Edington, William  
 William Rotheley, *See* Rotheley, William  
 William Waynflete, *See* Waynflete, William  
 William Wykeham, *See* Wykeham, William  
 William Zouche, *See* Zouche, William
- wills 2, 6, 9, 26, 44, 48–51, 54, 60, 63, 66–67,  
 71, 81, 87, 98–103, 107–11, 116, 121–22, 125,  
 128, 136, 140, 184, 189–90, 194–96  
 Wiltshire 58  
 Winchester 44–46, 49, 51–61, 63, 195–96  
 Winchester College 44, 49, 52–53, 56, 60–61  
 Windsor Castle 46, 51, 53–54, 61–62  
 witchcraft 24, 34, 38, 41 fn. 93, 81, 159, 169  
 witness 10–11, 17, 26, 65–75, 78–82, 84–85,  
 87, 95–101, 103–04, 140, 163–65, 179,  
 190, 195  
 Wittenberg 154  
 wounding, *See* homicide  
 Wrangel, Hannibal (1641–1643) 12–13  
*wyderkauf* 108  
 Wykeham, William, bishop of Winchester 5,  
 8–9, 13, 44–64, 195–96
- York, Anne of, *See* Anne of York, Duchess of  
 Exeter
- Zouche, William, Archbishop of York (archep.  
 1342–52) 57